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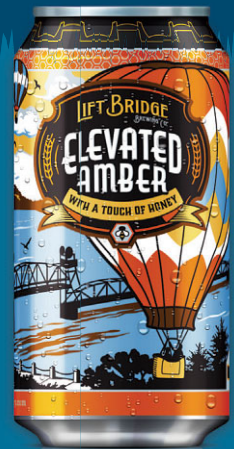
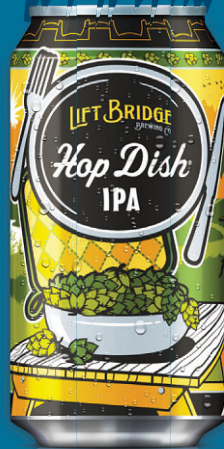


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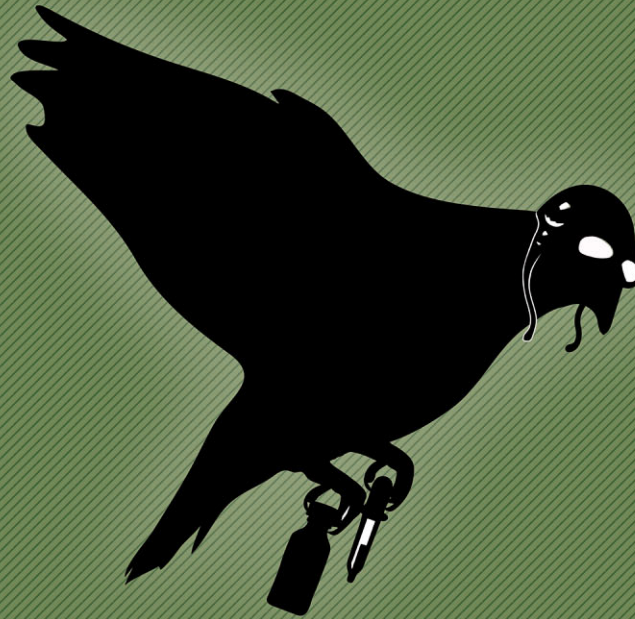
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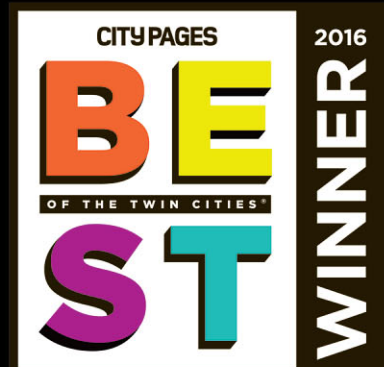
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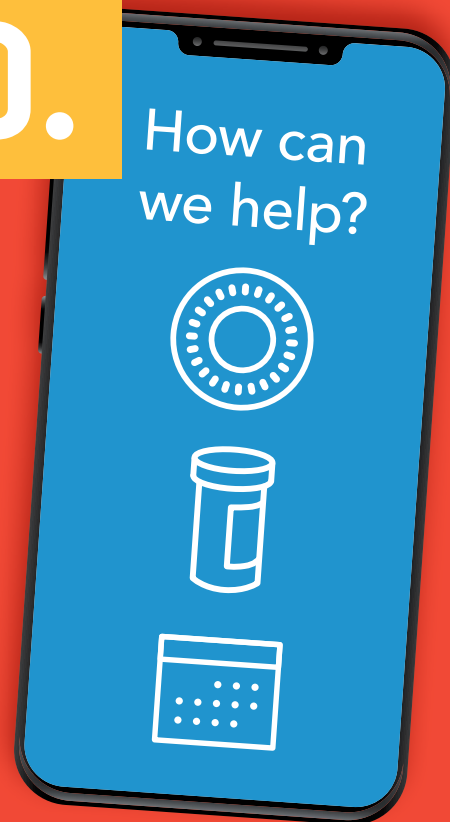
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Statement in Support of Police Reform and Chief Arradondo

The death of George Floyd was a chapter in a story that is as old as our nation and is, sadly, still being written in communities across the country. Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks... These names serve stark notice that policing across the United States needs transformational reform.

The problems with policing are deeply rooted in the structural racism that permeates our society and its institutions. The current rallying cries around “defunding,” “dismantling,” or “abolishing” the police are grounded in a basic truth that sweeping and visionary reforms are needed.

The answer is not to simply defund or dismantle the police. We need to address societal racism and rebuild our infrastructure so that we can reduce our reliance on policing. Minneapolis receives more than 400,000 calls for police services every year. Housing, education, health care, mental health and the environment are key fronts for enhancing safety.

Without a doubt, the Minneapolis Police Department needs transformational reform but we oppose the current proposal to amend the Minneapolis City Charter to remove the police department. This Charter amendment will not advance the transformational reform that is needed. In fact, it is a distraction from the necessary work at hand.

We believe we have a leader in place who can bring about the much needed change in the police department if he has adequate support. Chief Medaria Arradondo is an ethical, professional and compassionate leader. He knows our city and loves its people. He has a reform agenda, but has experienced opposition from the Police Union and has lacked support from the City Council. We call on our citizens to support Chief Arradondo in his effort to transform our police department.

We have an opportunity brought about by tragedy but it is an opportunity we can't waste. Minneapolis can become a model for the nation by rethinking the mission of policing. Only then can Minneapolis fulfill this moment and develop a new, bold model for a safe, inclusive community.

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Wow, what a year. (...Is it only July?) In March, we stopped leaving home almost entirely as the state went on COVID-19 lockdown. In May, we exploded from our shelters, taking to the streets to protest the murder of George Floyd and igniting a global reckoning with systemic racism. Our daily reality now would have been unrecognizable six months ago.

All of which is to say: Not all categories in this year's Best of the Twin Cities issue are exactly relevant. Some of them might never be again! How do we approach "Best Service" when for many, eating inside a restaurant is a source of anxiety and conflict? Both our 2020 "Best Dive Bar" and "Best Fine Dining" winners pivoted to hot dogs over the

past few months... why differentiate between the two?

Well, because all of this year's winners achieved a lot as they were. That shouldn't—and didn't—go unacknowledged.

Due to COVID-19, the uprising, or the uncertainty in the aftermath of both, we've lost plenty of beloved businesses—for now or forever—that might otherwise be here today. Many are receiving posthumous awards, and in cases where we know they's gone for good, we've noted as much. (But please, call or go online for the most up-to-date information. Not being able to go inside means we haven't fact-checked some of this since March, and a lot has changed since then.)

These are strange and challenging times. But we still have plenty to celebrate. Let's do so as we work to build a better and more just future together.

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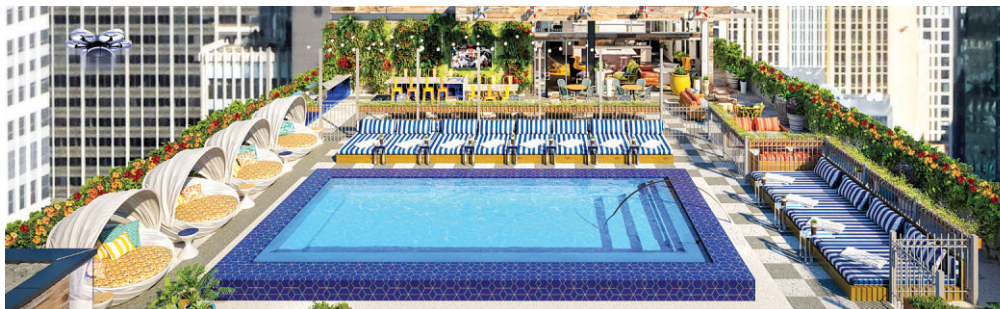
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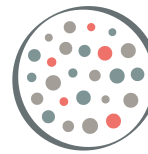
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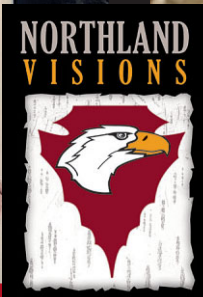
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Readers' Choice: Blick Art Materials

BEST MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Last summer, an all-female board of Native curators and advisors came together to create an exhibition exploring the artistic contributions of Native women. It was the first show of its kind, and the collection was extensive, with around 115 works covering over 1,000 years. Ancient pottery, historic paintings, and colonial-era beadworks were displayed along with contemporary items such as Rose B. Simpson's self-built Chevy El Camino, Jamie Okuma's fully beaded Louboutins, and Julie Buffalohead's playfully sharp paintings critiquing human nature. Getting "Hearts of Our People" down to those 115 works was brutal for the selection board. "This isn't comprehensive," MIA curator Jill Ahlberg Yohe reminded us before the opening. "This is just the beginning. This is the first of many, many shows celebrating Native women artists."

Illustration by
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BEST GALLERY EXHIBITION

Sanlé Sory: Volta Photo

Weinstein Hammons Gallery
908 W. 46th St., Minneapolis
612-822-1722

weinsteinhammons.com

You could almost hear the party music while looking at the images featured in “Sanlé Sory: Volta Photo” at Weinstein Hammons last fall. The photographs, taken by Sory in his hip West African studio from the 1960s through the ’80s, feature teenagers and young adults dressed in cool outfits blending Western and African fashion. You can sense that these young people were having fun, enjoying each other, and being creative. Sory’s pictures captured a moment of youthful exuberance and vitality, giving us a magical glimpse into the energetic youth culture he documented.

BEST MUSEUM

Minneapolis Institute of Art

2400 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-870-3000
artsmia.org

The Minneapolis Institute of Art has had quite a year. Last summer’s groundbreaking exhibit, “Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists,” was a powerful testament to what can happen when an arts institution dares to shift its gaze toward a group of people who have been long ignored by the mainstream. Then, last winter, the museum

hosted the stunning “When Home Won’t Let You Stay: Art and Migration.” That exhibition included the U.S. premiere of Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei’s *Safe Passage*, an installation where hundreds of life jackets were wrapped around Mia’s outside columns. There were also two new commissions by Indigenous artist collective Postcommodity, and the locally based international group CarryOn Homes. Both of these shows indicate that, in addition to its incredible collection of art from the past, Mia is forward-thinking and very much in tune with the current moment.

Readers’ Choice:
Minneapolis Institute of Art

BEST ART GALLERY

Law Warschaw Gallery

Macalester College’s Janet Wallace
Fine Art Center
130 S. Macalester St., St. Paul
651-696-6416

macalester.edu/gallery

Jehra Patrick has brought an exciting mix of art to Law Warschaw since her appointment in 2016 as curator and gallery director. Recent exhibitions have been smart and provocative, touching on many crucial conversations happening across the country. Nicholas Galanin’s “Everything We’ve Ever Been, Everything We Are Right Now” linked climate change to Indigenous rights. “Yes, and the body has memory,” curated by Mara Duvra,

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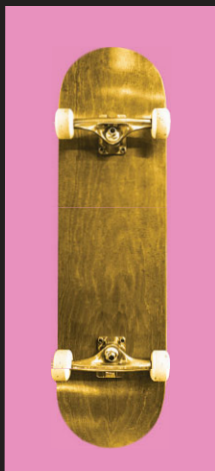
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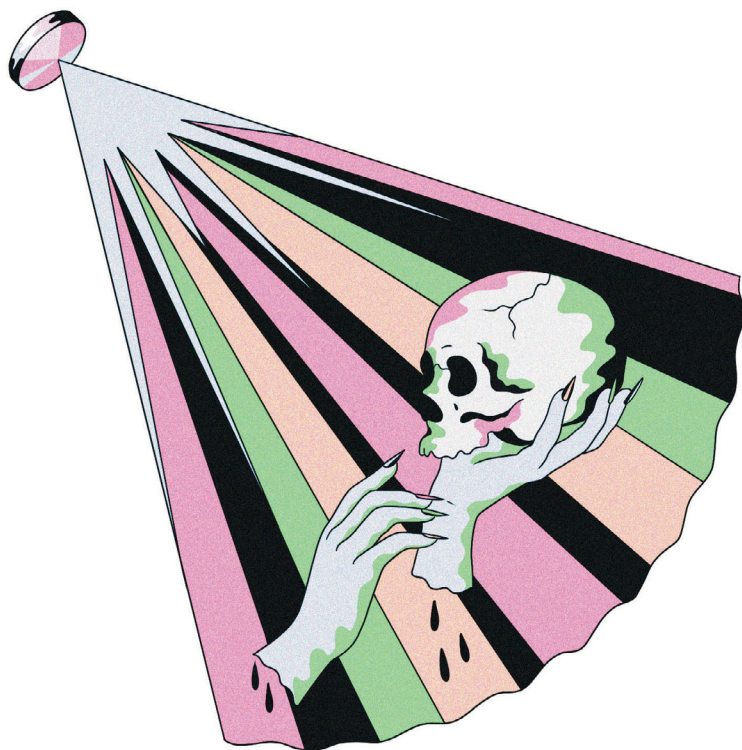
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paint job (blame the '90s). These days, the charming theater screens whatever the hell it wants. That usually entails a few buzz-worthy first-run flicks, ongoing film series (recent offerings have included selections from the Coen brothers and Martin Scorsese), and deep dives into weird VHS discoveries with the Found Footage guys. What's even more old-school? Tickets harken back to '00s-era prices, typically ranging from \$7 to \$12.

Readers' Choice: Riverview Theater

BEST PLAY

Macbeth

Wayward Theatre Company
waywardtheatre.org

Wayward Theatre Company describes itself as "dedicated to producing challenging work in equally challenging spaces." The beauty of staging *Macbeth* at the James J. Hill House last October, though, was that the mansion set the scene before the play even began. In that imposing structure, ringed by a cold iron fence, the title character's isolation and paranoia bloomed with a creepy richness. Given the strong cast, led by director Tim McVean, the show would have worked even if it stayed in a single room of the house. Raising the stakes, the Wayward artists took audience members on an odyssey: from an upper-floor witching hour to the depths of *Macbeth's* despair in the building's chilly lower reaches. The company leaned into the supernatural horrors of Shakespeare's

ghost story, and the result was truly hair-raising. Consistently engaging and darkly funny, this *Macbeth* was site-specific theater at its best.

BEST THEATER TROUPE

Haunted Basement

Rosedale Center
612-444-2191

hauntedbasement.org

There's a fourth wall in the Haunted Basement, but it's not the invisible one you look through to see the actors in a conventional stage production: It's one of the imposing barriers trapping you in a series of dark spaces with monsters beyond description. To make the Basement the scariest, most fascinating haunted house in Minnesota, dozens of performers spend untold hours planning, practicing, and pouncing—again, and again, and again. Whether you're the first guest on the earliest autumn night or the last victim to run screaming from the newly instituted holiday haunt, the Basement performers make you feel like you're the only one they've ever wanted to horrify. It takes particular talent, dedicated direction, and supreme patience: When people get scared, sometimes they act like real assholes. The ghouls soldier through, keeping the space scary but safe, while making sure it feels like death is waiting just around the corner. It's a testament to their success that legions of fans come back every year for the privileges of the performers' insidious attention.

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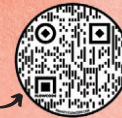
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BEST THEATER

Park Square Theatre

20 W. Seventh Place, St. Paul
651-291-7005

parksquaretheatre.org

Tucked away in the basement of the historic Hamm Building, Park Square Theatre is a treasure, an intimate playhouse that punches above its weight with more heart than pomp. It's not easy for a small theater to shake things up, but Park Square fought valiantly this year to shine a spotlight on immigrant stories, such as Julia Cho's *Aubergine*, while retaining the support of traditional patrons to balance its budget. Executive Director C. Michael-jon Pease lit a fire under local theater leaders to reckon with long-deferred problems of power imbalance and consent in the performing arts. Additionally, with *Rule of Thumb* last season and the ongoing Mysterious Old Radio Listening Society, signs point to Park Square becoming the principal theater to catch period murder mysteries, supernatural horror, and suspense. Frankly, we could never have enough of that.

Readers' Choice: Guthrie Theater

BEST ACTOR

China Brickey

chinabrickey.com

For years, China Brickey has been lighting up productions in supporting roles. If you saw her hilarious turn in Penumbra Theatre's *Girl Shakes Loose* (2017), the excitement she brought to Old Log Theatre's *Ghost the Musical* (2017), her stalwart sailor in Transatlantic Love Affair's *The Privateer* (2017), or her ebullient bridesmaid in the Ordway's *Mamma Mia!* (2018), you probably wondered when Brickey would finally get her star turn. Then, in 2019, director Lisa Channer put Brickey in the shoes of Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen's iconic heroine, in *Pride and Prejudice* at Park Square Theatre. In Kate Hamill's irreverent adaptation, Brickey set the perfect tone of playfulness balanced with sincere emotion and sparkling intelligence. If there was still an Ivey Award for emerging artist, this outstanding actor would be a prime contender.

BEST DESIGN IN A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

Chicago

Theater Latté Da

latteda.org

Chicago was hardly an obscure show when Theater Latté Da leader Peter Rothstein

set out to direct it last year. The musical has been a Broadway fixture for decades, touring productions have burned up the highways, and the 2002 film won six Oscars. Latté Da's team, though, transformed the Ritz Theater to draw audiences into an immersive world that set the show in a speakeasy and took us to a Chicago we'd never seen before. Scenic designer Eli Sherlock erased the line between actors and audience, pulling seats onstage and pushing artists into the house for a fully realized cabaret in which every single song had a distinct visual personality. Creative props and set elements appeared as if by magic; costume designer Alice Fredrickson and lighting designer Mary Shabatura ensured that every member of the charismatic cast shone with a fun, sexy sparkle.

BEST DIRECTOR

Lauren Keating

lauren-keating.com

On the surface, it hardly seems to matter who directs the Guthrie Theater's *Christmas Carol*. It's Dickens, it's Christmas, there's Scrooge and some spooky ghosts... we're good, right? Wrong. Over the course of her three years directing the holiday staple, Lauren Keating has brushed off the cobwebs, cut the cheesy gags, and uncovered the classic story's true heart: Amid profound grief, we can still find hope by working for change and rejecting cynicism. It's a vision that resonates in our alarming era, all the more so because Keating has noticeably increased the diversity onstage. The director also led last year's charming *Small Mouth Sounds* at the Jungle Theater. That play was set at a meditation center where characters onstage struggled to remain silent; audiences, meanwhile, rocked with gratifyingly audible laughter.

BEST ARTS EVENT

Out There Festival

Walker Art Center

walkerart.org

Walker Art Center's Out There Festival is a neoteric respite in the dead of winter, offering a mix of weird, brilliant, head-scratching, and sublime theater. The 2020 festival brought a roster of stunning, provocative works. Ligia Lewis's *Water Will (in Melody)* employed water works, tension, and movement, while Tina Satter's *Half Straddle: Is This A Room: Reality Winner Verbatim Transcription* examined civil disobedience in an era of Russian interference. Miguel Rodriguez's queer, anti-stereotype romp, *This Bridge Called My Ass*, was a wild ride, and Back to Back Theatre's *The*



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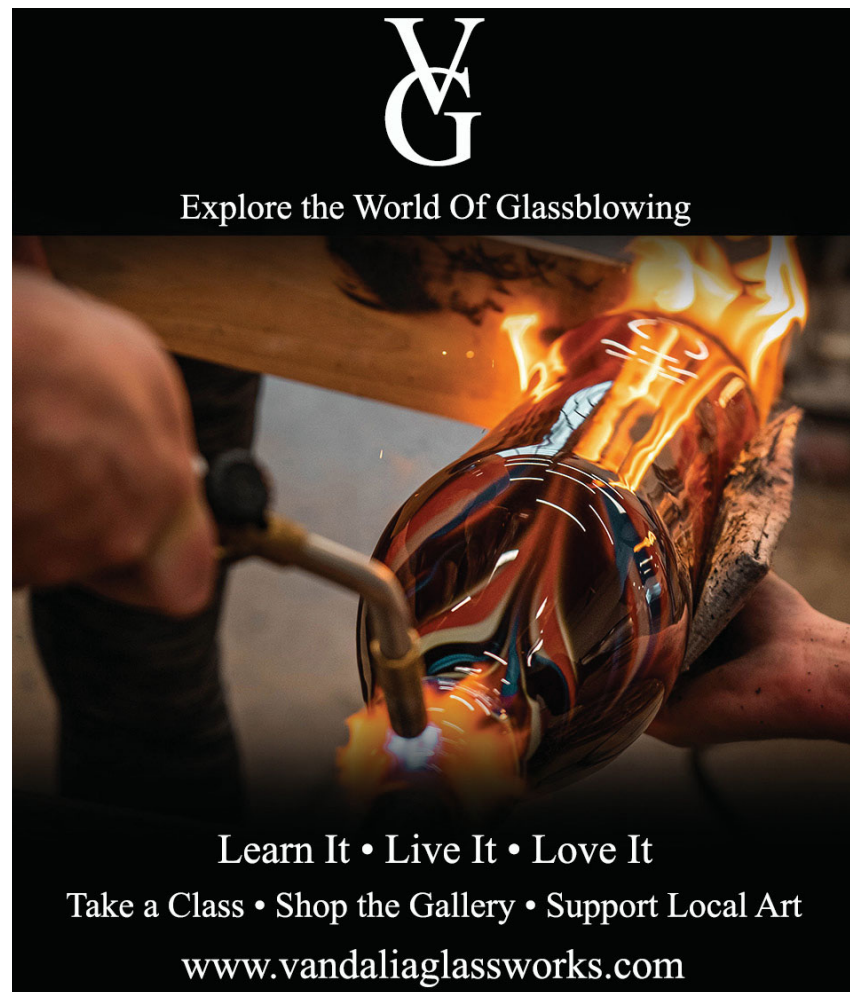
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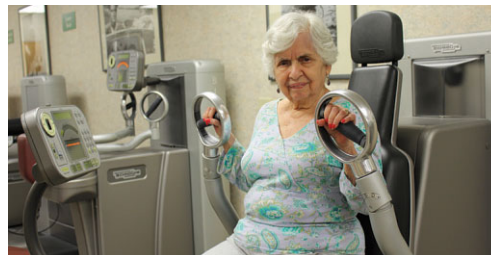
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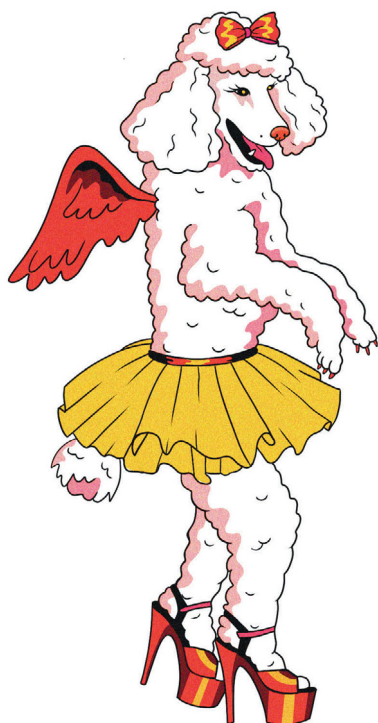
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BEST DANCE COMPANY

Ragamala Dance Company

711 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-824-1968
ragamaladance.org

The ancient South Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam is practiced with authoritative skill by Ragamala Dance Company, which, under the leadership of mother-daughter team Ranees and Aparna Ramaswamy, has been wowing audiences in Minneapolis and around the world since 1992. Ragamala dancers are exquisite in their craft, honoring tradition through movement and music while using ancient cultural texts. Ragamala also engages in collaborations with artists from other genres and disciplines, which in turn sheds new light on the classical dance form. The company has brought its work all over the world, but remains rooted to the Twin Cities, where we are often lucky to enjoy the first taste of new pieces.

BEST CHOREOGRAPHER

Rosy Simas

rosysimasdanse.com

While Rosy Simas is known for her beautiful, meditative dances, choreography is really only one piece of the Seneca artist's practice. Whether she's showing her work on a big stage like the Ordway, in the

middle of Franklin Avenue during Northern Spark, or inside the Weisman Art Museum, Simas draws on her many skills—including dance, filmmaking, and visual art—to create resonant interdisciplinary work. Her process is intensely collaborative, with both the dancers and the design teams, as well as the community. Simas will often have open rehearsals as a way of connecting to audiences long before the final product is finished, and this emphasis on process results in intimate, nuanced work.

BEST DANCE PERFORMANCE

Water Will (in Melody)

Walker Art Center

Ligia Lewis's dark feminist fairytale *Water Will (in Melody)* expertly incorporates themes of race, class, trauma, and gender into a hilarious, visually stunning feast. Part of the Walker's 2020 Out There Festival, the piece is based on a Grimm Brothers story about a "willful" child who is so naughty that God curses them with illness and death. After the child is buried, their hand pops out of the earth in defiance, leading the mother to chop it off. Lewis evokes this tale with frightening physicality, using a mix of dance, miming, and theater. The work is terrifying, humorous, and wonderful, and the Walker performance featured four powerhouse women onstage.

BEST PRO WRESTLER

Devon Monroe

@TheDevonMonroe

Gay panic has long been a trope in professional wrestling. From the exóticos of lucha libre to WWE's sexually ambiguous Goldust, homosexual performers have often been kept low on the card for their flamboyant behavior. But Devon Monroe takes that old-school homophobia and uses it as a superpower. The gender-fluid independent star is a head-turner between the ropes, bouncing from turnbuckle to turnbuckle with crane-like grace and impeccable eyeliner. In a top-rope signature move, the 21-year-old performer smashes opponents' faces repeatedly into their twerking ass, daring the crowd to deny the charisma and athleticism it takes to pull off such a move. You can't. Black sexcellence prevails, and it's running wild in the Twin Cities.

BEST STANDUP COMEDIAN

Miss Shannan Paul

missshannan.com

A fixture of the Twin Cities comedy scene for over 15 years, Miss Shannan Paul is the rare breed of comedian/performer

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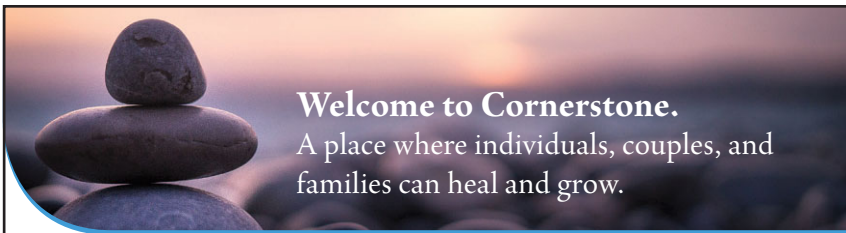
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who can truly fit into any setting. She can command the crowd in comedy clubs like Acme and House of Comedy, the airwaves as an on-air personality for MyTalk 107.1 and *The Jason Show*, or the internet as the host of the *Be Our Geek* podcast. She's also been working on creating new opportunities for female comedians, including last year's Pay Gap Comedy Tour, which featured comics of all backgrounds and levels of experience. Oh, and she was the Q&A moderator at *Napoleon Dynamite's* 20-year reunion at the Ordway last summer, an event that featured the cast (and an actual llama). There is no one more versatile, charming, and genuinely funny in Minnesota, and no matter where you see her, it's guaranteed to be a great show.

Readers' Choice: Carolyn Blomberg

BEST OPEN MIC (COMEDY)

Uproar at Du Nord Craft Spirits

2610 32nd St. E., Minneapolis
612-799-9166

@uproarmpls

Straight, white, male comics: Some of you are very funny. But there are so many other voices that deserve stage time as well. In November 2018, comedians Devohn Bland and Xochi de la Luna decided to take matters into their own hands, creating Uproar Open Mic. Taking place Mondays at Du Nord Craft Spirits, Uproar is an open mic for women, trans, nonbinary, Black, brown, indigenous, and LGBTQ comics. Each week features seven to 10 comedians doing five minutes each, and a pre-booked headliner closes out the show. What started as a small open mic has quickly become one of the most consistently funny showcases in town, where new comedians can work things out and more experienced performers can get weird. Past headliners have included local favorites like Brandi Brown and Mary Mack, as well as out-of-towners like Akeem Woods and Rachel Scanlon.

Readers' Choice: Acme Comedy Co.

BEST COMEDY CLUB

Sisyphus Brewing

712 Ontario Ave. W., Minneapolis
612-444-8674

sisyphusbrewing.com

With former standup comedian Sam Hariman at the helm, it's no surprise that Sisyphus Brewing started hosting weekly comedy shows out of the taproom right from the get-go. What is surprising is how Sisyphus has managed to establish itself as one of the most popular and, quite frankly,

best comedy clubs in a very comedy-rich city. The 100-seat space is sold out almost every night, with a mix of excellent local mainstays, fresh-faced open-mic hopefuls, and national headliners. The room is designed perfectly for comedy, which has made it a popular location for comics like Robert Baril, Geoffrey Asmus, and Myq Kaplan to record live albums. It also lends itself to opportunities for new voices, including the People of Comedy Showcase, which spotlights POC stand-ups of all backgrounds, the Pride Comedy Show, which takes place during the main festival, and the Friday night Amateur Hour open mic.

Readers' Choice: Acme Comedy Co.

BEST LOCAL COMEDY PODCAST

Middle of Somewhere

middleofsomewherepodcast.com

Chad Daniels and Cy Amundson are two of the funniest comedians to come out of Minnesota in the past several years. They're also close friends who regularly have some of the most insane conversations about their families, dogs, and careers. About a year ago, the duo decided to share those conversations with the world through their own weekly podcast. Whether you want to hear more about life as a working comedian, navigating marriage and fatherhood, or how to relieve a dog's penis swelling, *Middle of Somewhere* is a must-listen. It's two real friends having a real conversation. They just happen to be much, much funnier than you and your friends.

BEST BOOKSTORE (USED)

Eat My Words

214 13th Ave. NE, Minneapolis
651-243-1756

eatmywordsbooks.com

Dodge a denim couch. Watch your knee sneaking past an injection-molded coffee table with an incomplete Frida Kahlo puzzle sitting on top. Keep your eyes open: Eat My Words is a treasure trove with no operative logic. A signed copy of Nick Offerman's *Gumption* rests on a too-tall stack of *Bat Boy Lives!*, a Weekly World News compendium. Five feet behind the rack, a yellow spine with the words *Crocheting in Plain English* beckons in you in a serif font. This is a store where you can easily disappear, eventually finding yourself sitting in a secondhand chair in a secluded enclave with a pile of Shel Silverstein books that are all missing their dust jackets. That's a rare and wonderful thing.

Readers' Choice: Half Price Books

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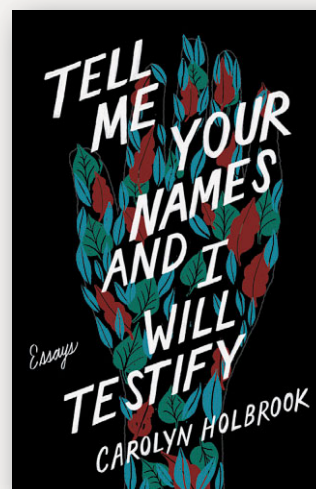
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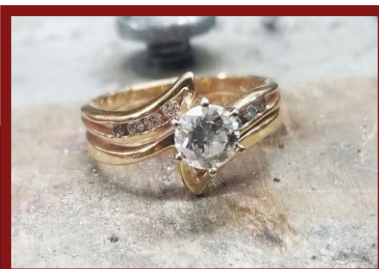
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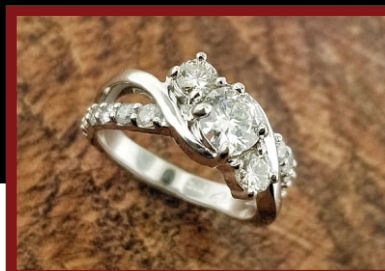
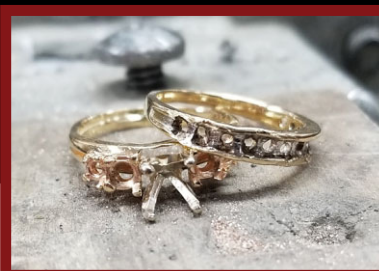
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Readers' Choice: Moon Palace Books

BEST POETRY COLLECTION

Homie by Danez Smith

danezsmithpoet.com

In their third poetry collection, *Homie*, Black, queer poet Danez Smith delivers another powerful literary punch. The title is a "Minnesota nice" variation on what the St. Paul native really wanted to name the release: *My Nig*. Themed around friendship and packed with slang, the book explores both bonds formed and loved ones lost. They touch on their roots in poems like "I'm going back to Minnesota where sadness makes sense," waxing poetic about the place where "you're the only warm thing for miles," and contemplate living with, and profiting from the discussion of, HIV. They also unfurl the multiple, layered meanings behind slurs like "nigga," "bitch," and "faggot." *Homie* isn't an easy or comfortable read, but Smith seems to know that's exactly what poetry lovers need right now.

BEST BOOK (NONFICTION)

Magical Realism for Non-Believers by Anika Fajardo

anikafajardo.com

Father-daughter relationships can be notoriously complicated, but Anika Fajardo's story is one for the books—literally. In her debut memoir, *Magical Realism for Non-Believers*, she retraces her roots to Colombia, the country where she was born but left as a young girl when the marriage of her Minnesotan mother and Colombian father imploded. In 1995, at age 21, Fajardo returned to her birthplace to reunite with

her father, Renzo, who has since remarried. What she discovers is not an instant kinship but a literary treasure trove of family secrets and a surprise revelation that redefines her conceptualization of family. Throughout the book, Fajardo loosely connects her narrative to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, though her story solidly stands on its own. In lyrical writing with vivid sensory details, Fajardo deftly explores how generations and geography influence one another.

BEST BOOK (FICTION)

The Shallows by Matt Goldman

mattgoldman.com

Nils Shapiro, Minnesota's favorite private eye, is back in *The Shallows*. It's summertime, and the livin' isn't so easy. Successful lawyer Todd Rabinowitz is found dead in Christmas Lake, hooked through the mouth with a fish stringer. Suspicion immediately turns to Mrs. Rabinowitz, who's been having an affair with a volatile artist. But Shapiro isn't convinced of her guilt, and the sleuth embarks on a mission with his business partner, Anders Ellegaard, to solve the crime. Meanwhile, the body count rises, and Shapiro struggles to get ahead of the carnage and solve the rash of murders while also juggling a complicated relationship with his ex-wife. In this, his third installment of the mystery series, Goldman delivers another smart and sizzling page-turner with plenty of Minnesota landmarks that locals will appreciate.

BEST AUTHOR

Peggy Orenstein

peggyorenstein.com

Minneapolis native Peggy Orenstein is back with another New York Times bestseller, *Boys & Sex: Young Men on Hookups, Love, Porn, Consent, and Navigating the New Masculinity*. For this eye-opening exposé that follows in the footsteps of her 2016 book, *Girls & Sex*, Orenstein interviewed more than 100 teens and young men about their sex lives. What she found were willing and eager participants in unpacking modern sexuality. Whether it's porn as a primary source of information about sex, wading through the culture of consent, or finding themselves on both sides of the sexual assault equation, young men are desperately grappling with more sexual dilemmas than the adults in their lives can imagine (much less feel brave enough to address). With special attention paid to the experiences of gay and trans populations, Orenstein has once again sparked a timely cultural conversation that's long overdue.



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Music

BEST VOCALIST

Channy Leaneagh

thisispolica.com

When she sings, Channy Leaneagh yokes together wild sonic contrasts, combining vaporous effervescence with a powerful keen that seems incapable of being silenced. And yet, in 2019, we nearly lost that voice after Leaneagh was injured in a quintessentially Minnesotan accident: She slipped while clearing ice dams. The singer was immobilized for months, and when she began recording the vocals for Polica's latest album, *When We Stay Alive*, she was still wearing a brace—there's a breathiness that comes close to gasps in "Be Again." Can we really hear an increased determination in Leaneagh's singing on the new album, or are we just projecting, knowing how she suffered and persevered? Either way, we've learned not to take her voice for granted.

BEST SONGWRITER

Mary Bue

marybue.com

Duluth-based for most of her prolific career, Bue moved to Minneapolis in 2017 and released a near-perfect EP, *The Majesty of Beasts*. After a three-year wait, a full-length follow-up, *The World Is Your Lover*, is due out this August, and it expands on everything that Bue does so well. Her lyrics are free-spirited but wary, resolute in the aftermath of failed and sometimes abusive love affairs, and her singer-songwriter's sense of hooky structure gives her band a solid base to work up some sharp arrangements. How good is Bue? If you didn't know the Tom Petty song on the new album was a cover, you'd think she wrote it.

BEST LIVE ARTIST

The Bad Man

thebadmanusa.com

The rowdy northeast Minneapolis quintet live up to their ominous name. Frontman Peter Memorich's intense shout-sung vocals perfectly suit the band's sax-laden punk sound, which combines the hardscrabble rawness of the Clash with



Illustration by
Noah Lawrence-Holder
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the swinging pulse of the Specials. You can't see them in concert right now, of course, but the group has captured the urgency of their live performances on their two excellent full-length records, *Ain't Clean* and *Laughing With Bad Teeth*, which showcase their boisterous, hard-charging sound, born out of too many late nights at the bar and all the questionable decisions that result.

BEST ALBUM

Lady Midnight,
Death Before Mourning

ladymidnight.bandcamp.com

After nearly a decade performing music professionally, Adriana Rimpel, aka Lady Midnight, finally delivered her debut full-length last May, and it was a stunner worth waiting for. The music is subtle but dense, its sound a kind of electronically adorned quiet storm that takes on political undertones as Midnight's voice imbues the tracks with incantatory power. But no matter how grandly the music swells, there's always a human scale to the vocals, an innate compassion that's palpable even when Lady Midnight is the one in pain.

Readers' Choice: Dessa, *Sound the Bells*

BEST SINGLE

Lunch Duchess, "Cry Pt. II"

lunchduchessmusic.bandcamp.com

The sequel to the synth indie-pop quartet's 2016 song "Cry" is giddier and more manic than its predecessor, not to mention catchier. That's partly due to Nicky Steve's carnivalesque keyboards and partly due to the way singer/drummer Katharine Seggerman's brightly chipper vocals explore the joys of emotional release and romantic dysfunction. "I like cry-y-y-y-ing for fun," Seggerman brags. "You know I said it before/I bet you thought I was done." Done? She's just getting started.

BEST EP

niice, *Never Better*

niice.bandcamp.com

Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody writes pop-punk songs about it. Well, almost nobody—niice (yes, that's three i's, just like in Miiinesota) happen to complain about our upper Miiidwestern climate twiiice (ok, we'll stop) in five (told ya we'd stop) songs that last a scant but scrappy 14 minutes. Lead guitarist Allegra Hernandez adds tuneful noise, drummer Sage Livergood and bassist Abe Anderson hold things together, and other topics of singer Roddy Gadeberg's refreshingly ordi-



nary disaffections include not hanging out with your friends, which has only made the EP that much more timely this summer.

BEST COMPILATION

Ear Coffee Charity Comp 2020

earcoffee.bandcamp.com

Founded by college students Wes Muihlenburg and Joe Keyport in August 2017, Ear Coffee has become one of the most reliable sources for breaking local music. Their first local compilation is wall to wall with songs you gotta know from bands you should already be familiar with. For only \$6, you get 19 tracks, including hits from Gully Boys, Why Not, Vial, Floodwater Angel, 4th Curtis, and niice. Better yet, that \$6 supports TIGERRS, a Minneapolis trans/intersex advocacy organization, so you can put over the local tastemakers and a righteous charity all with a click on your PayPal account.

BEST ALBUM COVER

Partition, *Prodigal Gun*

partition.bandcamp.com

The punk trio Partition's debut album, *Prodigal Gun*, was a long time gestating, and singer-bassist Taylor Nice nursed the idea for the its cover for almost as long. Trans musician Evyn Komstadius poses beatifically as the Virgin Mary, halo and all, cradling a rifle just like the good Lord

would like all Americans to do. The art is a deliberate queering of the Catholicism and gun culture Nice's family immersed them in as a child—as they told City Pages earlier this year, "I want to make the ultimate perversion of what those people hold dear." God bless.

BEST RECORD LABEL

Shifting Paradigm

shiftingparadigmrecords.com

When you think of Minnesota record labels, indie rock and hip-hop spring immediately to mind, but maybe the most exciting local imprint these days is a collective of jazz musicians. Virtuoso guitarist Zacc Harris started Shifting Paradigm to peddle his own music in 2012, and within two years was putting out other artists' records as well. Now the label offers an impressive range of improvisational music throughout the upper Midwest, including trumpeter John Raymond, Red Planet, and Harris's own Atlantic Quartet, operating with a humane business model that allots a generous 75 percent of earnings to the artists.

BEST SONG TO CRY TO

Graveyard Club, "It Hurts"

graveyardclub.bandcamp.com

It takes some breaking down, sometimes. Some insistence. The emotions are simmering somewhere down there, waiting

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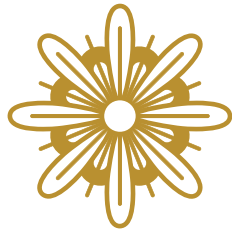
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for the right words to explode. We're all just dancing on the knife's edge, and "It Hurts" is the song that will nudge us over the limit. The second single off Graveyard Club's 2019 record *Goodnight Paradise*, "It Hurts" repeats its title over and over, Matthew Schuffman's dour baritone and Amanda Zimmerman's angelic soprano weaving together into a resonant vibration that quickly bubbles over. You're right, Graveyard Club, it does hurt. It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts.

BEST SONG TO HAVE SEX TO

booboo, "Mango"

booboo9.bandcamp.com

Call us old-fashioned, but what you should be paying attention to while you're having sex is... well, the "having sex" part of it. That doesn't mean the right soundtrack can't set the mood, but you don't want anything too insistent—nothing turns a libido into a libidon't faster than music that makes you self-conscious. That being said, may we recommend booboo's EP *I Don't Want to Wait* generally and "Mango" specifically? With the vocals blurred and the electronic rhythms subtly insinuating, you're left with something like pure sensation—so you can get on to the matter at hand.

BEST COVER SONG

Another Heaven, "Running Up That Hill"

anotherheaven.bandcamp.com

Dozens of bands have tried to make Kate Bush's 1985 hit their own, and local goth-rock band Another Heaven gave their interpretation in September, throwing the tune into a tarpit. In their hands, "Running Up That Hill" isn't the triumphant climb Bush sang it as, but a Sisyphean slog head-down through the fuzz. Though

the tone is much more downtrodden, it's clear how highly the band prizes the song. Instead of trying to amplify the drama like Meg Myers or completely restyling it like Placebo, Another Heaven pay homage to the aesthetic of Bush's era while shifting to a resonant downbeat mood.

BEST EARWORM

Yam Haus, "Stargazer"

Yam Haus's 2018 LP *Stargazer* opens with a curious arpeggio, an undulating line of keys that grabs you immediately, then cuts quickly to a six-string groove, singer Lars Pruitt bursting onto the track with Harry Styles convocation. Though it's hardly begun, "Stargazer" has you—and it will not release you until it's unloaded its arsenal of hand claps, 808s, and space synths. What is happening? Who assembled this megalomaniacal tune? Is Pruitt actually scatting on the bridge? Hips don't ask such questions, and you'll be dancing like a drunk long before you get an answer.

BEST HIP-HOP VERSE

Lexii Alijai, "Anthony"

soundcloud.com/lexiialijai/anthony

This year began on a horrific note locally, with the news that brilliant young St. Paul rhymers Lexii Alijai had died of an opioid overdose on New Year's Eve. Our choice of the final recording she released during her life isn't just a sentimental nod to a promising artist gone too soon, though. All three verses are fire, marked by the internal rhymes, urgent flow, and brisk storytelling that made Lexii one to watch. But the final verse is the clincher, a conversation between a man and a woman who only acknowledge their mutual attraction after mixed romantic signals, miscommunications, and bruised feelings make love or even sex impossible for them.



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BEST HIP-HOP ARTIST

Taylor J

soundcloud.com/taylorjtakeover

Exceedingly humble despite his obvious talents, Taylor J had every reason to lose faith after his friend and collaborator Nipsey Hussle died and a deal with Empire records fell apart in the same year. But the young St. Paul rapper is a champion, and champions rise. J turned 2019 into a year of triumph, progressing his skill on the mic alongside his brand and presentation. His May 2019 release *Roses* is the absolute height of J's career as a rapper, and yet it doesn't feel like he's reached peak. More like he's still on his way up.

Readers' Choice: Melly Mike

BEST ROCK BAND

Muun Bato

muunbato.com

Muun Bato's self-titled 2019 debut record is a dreamy rush of expansive bliss. The Minneapolis quintet is composed of rock veterans from notable Twin Cities groups such as First Communion Afterparty,

Flavor Crystals, Basement Apartment, Bridge Club, and Driftwood Pyre. But as good as those other bands were, they never sounded quite like this. Fusing the psychedelic rock of the '60s and '70s with modern shoegaze and gauzy dream-pop, *Muun Bato* is one of the most assured and adventurous debut albums in the Twin Cities in years. The band captures a vibe that is immediately warm and familiar, yet has an innovative, futuristic quality.

Readers' Choice: Gully Boys

BEST METAL BAND

Obsequiae

Medieval metal is not for everyone, and this trio's third album, *The Palms of Sor-rowed Kings*, begins with a delicate harp set piece from Vicente La Camera Mariño that might scare off connoisseurs of more straightforward carnage. Building off the finer parts of their groundbreaking 2015 album, *Aria of Vernal Tombs*, the music is unflaggingly melodic, even pretty, though it's cut through with the ragged throat-shredding of Tanner Anderson (who does triple duty as singer, guitarist, and bassist)

and elements of black and death metal—proof that true beauty and utter brutality can indeed coexist.

BEST JAZZ ARTIST

Mankwe Ndosi

mankwendosi.com

Mankwe Ndosi isn't so much a vocalist as a portal of sound—words get melted, molded, and otherwise shapeshifted into flares from her soul, dispatches from her muse, and the sheer joy of riffing freely. Her curation of five Great Black Music Mondays at Icehouse last December generated an Afrocentric vibe and space for spontaneous improvisation that nestles into the root of jazz. But she can also play it straight, as when she knocked the socks off a Walker audience with a coquettish rendition of Henry Threadgill's "Apricots on Their Wings" last February.

BEST R&B ARTIST

Velvet Negroni

velvet-negroni.com

Under multiple aliases, with various

groups, Jeremy Nutzman has been offering up his eccentric sensuality around town for years. But he came into his own on last year's *Neon Brown*, as simpatico support from his friends Elliott Kozel and Psymun established the perfect shape-shifting bed of sonics for his versatile voice. He swoops into a falsetto, serrates his vowels, and sometimes doesn't seem to sing so much as float along with the music. Like so much electronically tinged contemporary music, Velvet Negroni's sound sometimes feels beyond genre. But for all Nutzman's emotional ambiguity, there's a warmth to his tone that's pure R&B.

Readers' Choice: Velvet Negroni

BEST CLUB DJ

DJ Truckstache

Okay, maybe we're using the word "club" a little loosely here. But the Turf is a club, and that's where you'll often find DJ Truckstache—the honky-tonk-loving, songs-about-trucks-spinning country king. From twangy heartstring tuggers about the one who got away to boot-stomping romps about drinkin' and screwin', this Southern-



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fried 'stache man will have you dusting off your denim, digging out your cowboy hat, and wishing you'd ever learned how to line dance. More like... Yee-J? (Sorry! We're working on it!)

Readers' Choice: DJ Shannon Blowtorch

BEST PRODUCER

Psymun

psymun.bandcamp.com

For a superproducer, Simon Christensen keeps a low profile. Originally emerging from the multitalented crew thestand4rd, Psymun has become the most sought-after Minnesotan beatmaker in modern music, contributing to tracks from Young Thug, Juice Wrld, Future, and Gunna over the past few years. His best and most defining production, however, has come from his recent work with other locals, on Dizzy Fae's *No GMO*, Polica's *When We Stay Alive*, and especially his collaborations with Dua Saleh on their two EPs. Moody yet soulful, his beats are always recognizable as belonging to Psymun—and how many producers, in the Twin Cities or anywhere, can you really say that about in 2020?

BEST EVENT PROMOTER

Flip Phone

flipphoneevents.com

With their over-the-top embrace of camp nostalgia, Flip Phone have been key players in helping the Twin Cities become a welcoming, industrious home for drag. Created to celebrate Britney Spears's heyday, Flip Phone has quickly become a standard-bearer for what makes a good party in town. They've long since conquered dance nights. Now brunch is a Dolly Parton-themed turn up. Emo Night is a risqué revue in black nail polish. Soon, they'll be turning high tea into a mad theater of lust. There is seemingly no event Flip Phone won't turn into an extravagantly burlesque romp.

BEST BAND TO BREAK UP

Sleep Debt

sleepdebtmn.bandcamp.com

Sleep Debt went out in a barrage of love. The screamo band played their farewell show at a packed and sweaty Seward Community Cafe on September 11, the heart-wrenching culmination of weeks of drawn-out pre-

mourning, guitars chugging to a final halt, vocal cords worn to threads. It'd only been a little over a year since Sleep Debt ripped into the scene, and it felt like their rise was only beginning. They left their fans with the aptly titled EP *Stages of Grief*; meant to temper the pain, it only teased what might've come if the ultraviolent four-piece had stayed together.

BEST NEW BAND

Vial

vialmpls.bandcamp.com

This punky quartet center their songs on what they call "looming adulthood and soured relationships," two topics that never go out of fashion. Their debut full-length is called *Grow Up*—a phrase they don't seem too thrilled to hear, judging from the title track—and it's proof yet again that you don't need all that much to be a great band: just the right things to complain about, a few good tunes, and the spirit to put 'em across. Their best songs are about listening to your therapist about not getting back with your ex, and the persistence of scene sexism, and in both

cases they seem to speak from experience.

Readers' Choice: Immaculate Beings

BEST ACOUSTIC PERFORMER

Katy Vernon

katyvernon.com

Thanks to certain twee performers, the ukulele has been unfairly written off as a novelty instrument in recent years. But Katy Vernon uses the little modern-day lute as the basis of her songwriting, taking advantage of how it sounds within her band's folk-rock arrangements. And on last year's excellent *Suit of Hearts*, Vernon proved the uke was a more-than-adequate instrument for songs about weighty subjects like the death of her mother and her own sobriety. An indefatigable live performer, Vernon's kept up her pace in the pandemic era as well, as one of the early adapters to livestream concerts.

BEST BAND NAME

Dad Bod

dadbodmn.bandcamp.com

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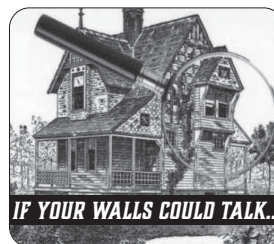


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celebrate them, co-opt their hokeyness without earning the biological right to. In 2019 aping Dad Culture went much further than buying a pair of pillowy New Balances, taking on some truly incongruous forms—such as Minneapolis sadcore band Dad Bod. Singer Callie Marino pays homage to the muffin-topped glory of the paternal physique in a mournful lo-fi yawp. The average dad wouldn't get it, but Twitter is loaded with not-so-average dads, and we celebrate Dad Bod for their benediction of fatherhood's digital lore. Really excited for 2020's breakout band: reclusive bedroom pop duo Wife Guy.

BEST STAGE STYLE

Sophia Eris

[instagram.com/sophiaeris](https://www.instagram.com/sophiaeris)

Rapper, DJ, radio personality, and (if all goes well) soon-to-be music club owner Sophia Eris is also an inimitable fashionista who shows off as many different looks as she takes on roles in the local music community. Scroll through her Instagram and you'll see a new Sophia every day. She's sometimes sporty, sometimes cozy, sometimes clubby, always unique in how she mixes and matches styles. Her hair may be bobbed or flowing or natural or (why not?) green, often tucked into one of the hats she's got a special flair for accessorizing with. Whether she's supporting Lizzo or doing one of her own events, seeing which Sophia shows up is half the fun.

BEST REUNION

Tapes 'n Tapes
[tapesntapes.com](https://www.tapesntapes.com)

September's out-of-nowhere return of indie rock darlings Tapes 'n Tapes seemed to catch everyone by surprise. But those fans who caught the band's reunion at Dual Citizen Brewery (or their secret warm-up gig at 331 Club a few weeks prior) were reminded of just how damn good TnT's songs are, and how much they've been missed over the years. The Twin Cities quartet broke big with their 2005 debut, *The Loon*, riding the initial wave of blog-band buzz that was never built to last; they released two more records before going on hiatus in 2013. Tapes still clearly have fun playing together and get along well both on and off stage, so the chances are good that we will get more local performances from the group, as well as hopefully some new music down the line.

BEST MUSIC CONTROVERSY

The Current fires Brian Oake

It started innocently enough. Oake, one the hosts of 89.3 the Current's *Morning Show*, was at the Palace one night last July with his daughter to see Tenacious D. A club staffer contended that Oake was giving the minor alcohol; Oake said he was just sharing some ice from his empty drink. After Oake and his offspring got booted, he blasted the club and the

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employee in a (since-deleted) Facebook post. The Twin Cities soon got word that Oake was no longer with the Current. Was the station protecting its relationship with First Ave? Guarding its image? Were there long-standing grievances between the station and the DJ? All of the above? Nobody's talking, so we can only guess. All's we know is, Oake has a new podcast, the Current is still doing their thing, and the rest of us got a juicy bit of media gossip.

BEST SELLING OUT

Lizzo's "Juice" in a Bounty paper towel commercial

Whoever Lizzo has hired to license her music is certainly earning their cut of the proceeds—you were just as likely to hear the former Minnesotan's hits in movie trailers or commercials as you were on the radio in 2019. But one ad in particular stands out as being so on the nose it could have started as a joke. "What if we advertised Bounty paper towels for when you spill your juice—and used Lizzo's 'Juice' in the ad?" What's next—Crest Whitening Strips are "Good As Hell" at cleaning your teeth? "Truth Hurts"... but Johnson's Baby Shampoo never will? Lizzo, you know where to find us.

BEST MUSIC VIDEO DIRECTOR

Paul von Stoetzel killingjokefilms.com

Paul von Stoetzel calls his company Killing Joke Films, which pretty aptly sums up the macabre humor that manifests in his music videos. A clip for Carnage the Executioner's ode to veganism "Eat to Live," for instance, is set to bloody scenes of dismemberment. But gore's not von Stoetzel's only medium: In Leslie Rich's "Kidder's Son," the singer-songwriter transforms from a buttoned-up businessman to a clown. And the director's work with SYM1 (formerly Symone Smash It) has helped developed that musician's own eye-popping style. We can't wait to see what's next.

BEST MUSIC VIDEO

Gully Boys, "New Song No. 2"

Being in Gully Boys seems like a goddamn blast. Kathy Callahan, Nadirah McGill, and Natalie Klemond are having the time of their lives ascending to the top of the local music scene, and director Maria Davidson wanted to make the entire Twin Cities jealous of their friendship with her video for "New Song No. 2." The clip is a virtual photo booth, as Gully Boys go drag and parody prominent music videos from various boy bands throughout pop history,

from the Beatles to Queen to NSYNC, the goofs mounting as the song builds to its breathtaking finale.

BEST MUSICAL ACT OF PROTEST

Sounds of Blackness, "Sick and Tired"

Local musicians have spent the most tumultuous year in recent Minneapolis history in the thick of the action—protesting, organizing benefits, raising funds, acting as medics, and delivering supplies. And, of course, they've been making music. Of all the musical responses to George Floyd's murder, however, the fiercest came not from any young punks or rappers, but from a storied Twin Cities musical institution. Sounds of Blackness director Gary Hines dipped into a well of anger that his Grammy-winning choir rarely expresses for this Juneteenth-released song, with the great Jamecia Bennett front and center and an unflinching lyric placing it in the long tradition of Black protest.

BEST LOCAL MUSIC PODCAST

Back to the City mixcloud.com/simon-calder

There is no more dedicated documentarian of the modern-day Twin Cities music scene than Simon Calder, host of the *Back to the City* podcast. For the past four years, Calder has engaged in some of the most in-depth and analytic conversations with local artists ever recorded, giving Minneapolis/St. Paul musicians an unprecedented platform for open expression. *BTTTC* has gone through many iterations in its many episodes, and was even hosted by City Pages for a short time, but in 2019, Calder kicked off a live event series hosted regularly at Mortimer's. No matter the format, though, Calder has stuck to his core mission of telling the best stories in local music.

BEST MUSIC FESTIVAL

Moodhouse Fest

Remember music festivals? The big ones this summer succumbed to coronavirus cancellations, but way back in October, after prime fest season had waned, the noise-rap duo Moodie Black gathered together something a little different, without the support of a radio station or fancy brewery, outside Du Nord Craft Spirits in the Longfellow neighborhood. The initial plan was to showcase other practitioners of the group's genre, but instead they embraced a stylistically diverse lineup

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that brought together touring acts like Dalek and locals like New Primals, and Lizea Harper. The music was still often abrasive, but the space was radically inclusive. May there be a second incarnation someday.

Readers' Choice: Soundset

BEST CONCERT (LOCAL ARTIST)

Nur-D at First Avenue

First Avenue's Best New Bands night each January is an excellent way to catch up on local music for anyone who's fallen a bit behind. It's also a rare opportunity for fledgling acts to take over the Mainroom. The headliner this year, rapper Nur-D, who'd already won City Pages' Picked to Click poll a few months earlier, is the kind of performer who understands that when you're on the big stage, you gotta go big. And so he brought out a full band, complete with horn section and backup singers, attired in full *Space Jam* uniforms. (The MC himself, of course, was Bugs.) The music, largely from his excellent album, *Songs About Stuff*, lived up to the spectacle, and Nur-D's high-spirited stage presence brought it all back home.

Readers' Choice: Nur-D

BEST CONCERT (TOURING)

Mountain Goats at First Avenue

John Darnielle's gifts as a prolific yet shockingly consistent recording artist and a consummate lyricist almost overshadow the fact that he's a dynamite bandleader and performer—but not if you're in the crowd on a night that he's on fire. And on May 17, 2019, at First Avenue, Darnielle's Mountain Goats were ablaze. This was an epic foray, with a 26-song setlist covering the new *In League With Dragons* and reaching deep into the Goats' back catalog while making space for a solo Darnielle set that included full-club singalongs to the labor anthems "Solidarity Forever" and "There Is Power in a Union" and plenty of space for the singer's world-class banter. We could have left satisfied after the six-song encore. Instead we left elated after a second two-song nightcap.

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A photograph of the interior of Otters Saloon, showing a bar with a bartender and patrons. The saloon has a rustic, cozy atmosphere with warm lighting and wooden decor.

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Music

screening, it's now a cornerstone of the local music scene. In addition to hosting record-release nights for up-and-coming bands and intimate theater shows for established acts, the Parkway also features perfectly paired musical performances before film screenings and musicians providing stylish accompaniments for silent films. The 88-year-old south Minneapolis theater has become a cozy, neighborhood hang, with weekly screenings of classic films, as well as notable appearances by John Waters, Dave Eggers, and high-profile comedians. There's something for everyone at the Parkway, and the theater will immediately make you feel at home as soon as you step inside.

Readers' Choice: First Avenue

BEST KARAOKE

Mortimer's Auto-Tune Karaoke

2001 Lyndale Ave S, Minneapolis
612-872-1688

mortimersbar.com

You can't sing. That's fine—lots of perfectly decent people can't sing, and neither can Kanye. But is that any reason you should be barred from the karaoke stage? Of course not. Mort's Auto-Tune Karaoke allows you to overcome your vocal insufficiencies and channel your inner T-Pain, Travis Scott, or Cher. Is that cheating? Well, you wouldn't sing karaoke without a microphone, and what is that but a technological aid? Auto-Tune has, for good or bad, become an indelible part of modern pop music, and it's a democratizing force as well. Why should great singers have all the fun?

Readers' Choice: Vegas Lounge

BEST VENUE TO OPEN

Part Wolf

501 Cedar Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-338-6424

partwolfmpls.com

It happened overnight. Last June, the old Nomad World Pub, whose owner had run into some difficulties in the neighborhood, had a new name and new ownership. With downstairs and upstairs stages, the re-christened Part Wolf soon endeared itself to bands shut out of the bigger clubs, including the metal and other heavy music groups that sometime have a hard time finding a home. But no one style dominates Part Wolf. With live music on the West Bank endangered, and small clubs in shorter supply than we need, it's a welcome addition to the neighborhood.

BEST VENUE TO CLOSE

Lee's Liquor Lounge

101 Glenwood Ave, Minneapolis

Bars come and go, and many are fondly recalled, but few create as distinctive a scene as Lee's did in the '90s. It was then, under owner Louie Sirian and booker Nate Dungan, that hipster couples flocked to Glenwood Avenue to dance to country, rockabilly, and other twangy sounds. After the club was sold in 2015, it became a haven for punk and metal bands. But last year new owner Craig Kruckeberg said he couldn't go on because the city of Minneapolis would no longer allow him to use the bar's side parking lot. For its final nights, Lee's reverted to its former self, as Texas singer Dale Watson returned to sing the little song he'd written about the joint, "Louie's Lee's Liquor Lounge."

Readers' Choice: Lee's Liquor Lounge

BEST JAZZ CLUB

Icehouse

2528 Nicollet Ave, Minneapolis
612-276-6523

icehousempls.com

The only pure jazz club in town is Jazz Central, a basement dive that exists more for players than listeners, and the handful of other fine establishments often rely on performance tributes to bygone greats, which pay the bills but lack the creative spark that's the essence of jazz. Icehouse gets the nod for handing out a month of Monday nights to a specific local jazz artist to curate however he or she sees fit. Throw in the occasional national act (Tim Berne, John Medeski, one of Dave King's projects), good sight lines, an excellent beer and liquor list, and an informal ambiance... and we've got a winner.

BEST MUSIC RESIDENCY

Faarrow at the Cedar

This category gets more competitive each year, with an increasing number of clubs giving over the winter months to prime songwriters and improvisational musicians. But let's not overlook what's on offer with the Cedar's Midnimo program, a showcase for internationally known Somali musicians. Last year, the Somali-born, Toronto-based duo of Iman and Siham Hashi took up residency at the center, and during their stay they enlisted local funk experimentalists Astralblak to help further their mix of traditional music and modern hip-hop-inflected sounds. The result was both expansively global and intensely local.

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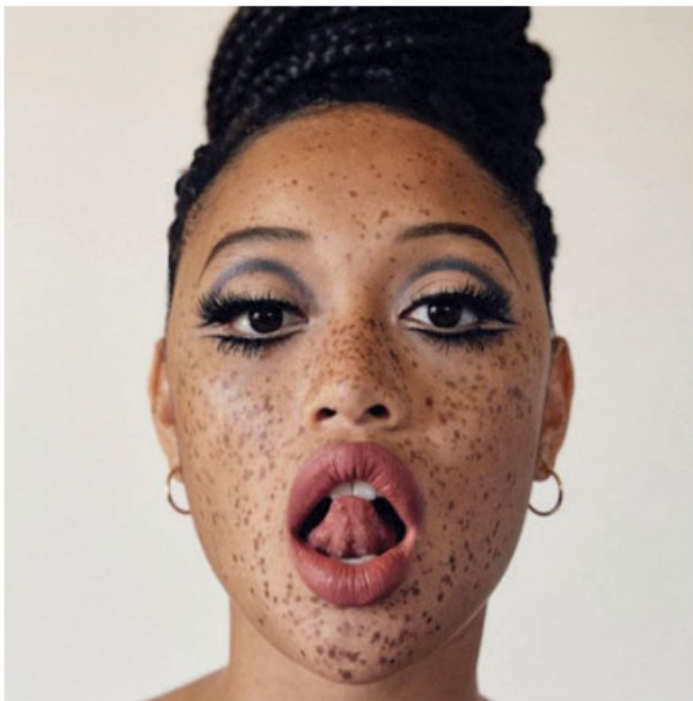
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BEST POLITICIAN

Mitra Jalali

You'd like Mitra Jalali even if she were dull. Elected to the St. Paul City Council in 2018 at age 32, the former teacher carried a tenant rights proposal that just made the capital city the best place to rent in the state. The daughter of an Iranian immigrant and a Korean adoptee, Jalali is thoroughly qualified to represent a city that's much younger and less white than its perception. She's also self-deprecating, quirky, fashionable—check back for updates on her latest hair color—and unashamedly nerdy about comics and video games. Throw her accomplishments in the face of anyone who talks down to millennial work ethic, and put her Instagram in front of anyone who tries to say St. Paul's boring.

BEST LOCAL PERSON MADE GOOD

Chloe Radcliffe

Five years ago, Chloe Radcliffe got laid off by Target Corp. and decided to pursue comedy. The standup with the trademark birthmark quickly established herself as comedic force locally, and then absconded to New York City a few years later. This past winter, Radcliffe returned home for the holidays, where she wound up conducting a surprise video job interview with Jimmy Fallon—from her mother's kitchen table. "During my interview, Jimmy walked in and said, 'Nice to meet you. You're so funny!'" and I said, "Uh, thank you. You're so funny!" It still feels wild," she told CP in January. It went very, very well. Radcliffe is now a staff writer for the freaking *Tonight Show*.

BEST POWER COUPLE

Ilhan Omar and Tim Mynett

Plenty of partnerships have the kind of passion worth breaking up a marriage or two, as this one did. But do you love your partner enough to expose yourself to worldwide tabloid scrutiny, like Tim Mynett did? Is there someone you feel strongly enough about that you'd keep right on spending money (\$878,000) with his consulting firm, despite a campaign finance complaint,



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Noah Lawrence-Holder
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as U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar has? From death threats to venomous Trump tweets, Omar's first term has been insanely stressful. It's nice to see her smile, though, as she did in the March tweet announcing these two cuties had sneakily tied the knot.

BEST WEBSITE

Sahan Journal

sahanjournal.com

It's no secret that newsrooms across the country are dying. So how blessed are the Twin Cities to have gained two of 'em over the past year? Sahan Journal, launched by veteran local journalist Mukhtar M. Ibrahim, is especially unusual: a nonprofit news outlet "dedicated to telling untold stories of Minnesota's new Americans." In a blindingly white industry, the essentiality of a Sahan Journal is even more pronounced. And, with an assemblage of diverse bylines, the online paper is already churning out important stories on underrepresented communities while keeping the mainstream press honest. Special shoutout to that other new T.C. news site, J. Patrick Coolican's Minnesota Reformer.

BEST PODCAST

Wine & Crime

wineandcrimepodcast.com

At the start of each episode, an alarmingly Minnesotan voice warns: "Wine & Crime contains graphic and explicit content which may not be suitable for some listeners." Hosts Amanda Jacobson, Kenyon Laing, and Lucy Fitzgerald (the latter two natives of Twin Cities suburbs) put a familiar accent on the wildly popular genre of true crime podcasts. Each episode has a theme—"Evil Twins," for example, or "Foreskin Forensics"—and comes with a suggested wine pairing. The trio's chemistry and wit makes it sound like you dropped in on friends who relish the darkest kinds of gossip and just opened a second bottle.

BEST RADIO STATION

KFAI

kfai.org

It's hard to feel a sense of community as a pandemic drives us into isolation. Thankfully, one of the most representative forces

for the community is still going strong, broadcasting voices and music from basically every group that calls the Twin Cities home—Native, Black, Eastern African, Latinx... the list just keeps going. With the airwaves polluted by sterile corporate radio sameness, KFAI is a hyper-local oasis that still manages to take listeners all over the globe. "It's been a time to reevaluate our purpose in the community," KFAI host Barb Abney recently told us, reflecting on COVID-19. "We're all asking how we can offer a comforting presence."

Readers' Choice: 89.3 the Current

BEST RADIO PERSONALITY

Angela Davis

Minnesota Public Radio has historically been about as white as you can get. Enter Davis, who joined MPR in 2018 after a long career in local television. Her transition to long-form interviews and listener call-ins was a smooth one: She's warm and well-informed, as comfortable probing experts about mental health and the economy as she is gabbing about food or TV shows. Davis's guest list is as diverse

as her interests, and she hosted difficult, complicated conversations about race even before the death of George Floyd.

Readers' Choice: Mary Lucia

BEST COLUMNIST

Sam Cook

With the David Brookses and Bret Stephens of the world belching out upper-crust hackery, it's reassuring to know there's a salt-of-the-earth muser on the North Shore, one who's immune to the hot-take chaos of our current hellworld. More than anything else, the Duluth News Tribune's Sam Cook enjoys walks in the woods, always with his trusty yellow dog in tow. He paints portraits of humanity from chance encounters on the Superior Hiking Trail, makes peace with long winters on his snowy deck, and relishes the interconnectedness of swapping deer-hunting stories. Cook's prose is comfort food; his outlook is as pristine and unpolluted as the wilderness he worships. Who couldn't use regular doses of that medicine these days?



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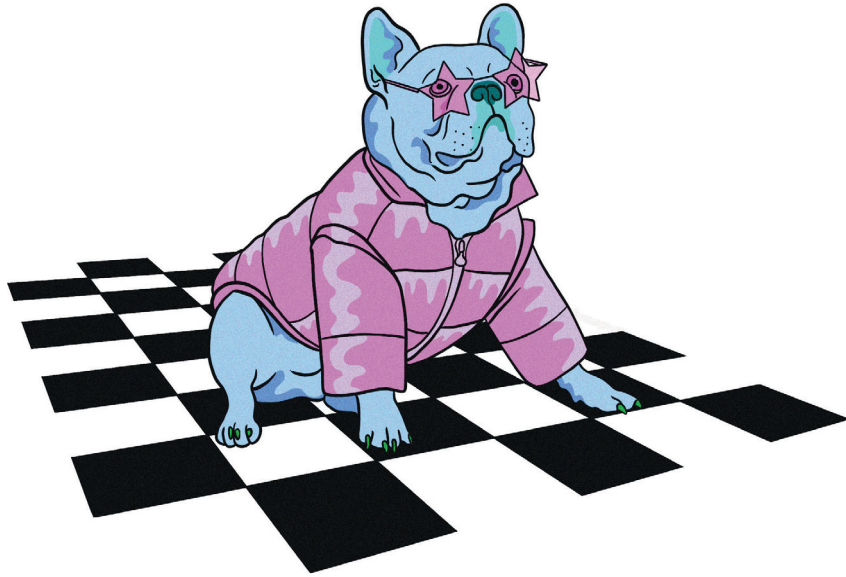
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BEST DRESSED

Alexandria Cochran

[instagram.com/ampersandria](https://www.instagram.com/ampersandria)

Cochran, who's mostly known by her social media handle @ampersandria, delights followers as she jetsets via her flight attendant job, scoring adorable vintage finds from all over the globe. The wing-tipped mid-century obsessive effortlessly showcases her treasure-loaded wardrobe—endless retro dresses, vintage Miller High Life hats, go-go boots, you name it. Amp's effervescent personality is always shining, whether she's scooting on her moped, shamelessly tweeting puns, or getting real about mental health. Glamorous yet unpretentious, @ampersandria is a must-follow Twin Cities personality.

BEST TWEETER

@_jazzghost_

On October 7 of last year, @_jazzghost—the Twitter account belonging to local musician Trevor Woggon—had around 1,900 followers. Then, the following day, he issued the following tweet: “Casual sex implies the existence of ranked competitive sex.” Viral gold. Over the next 48 hours Woggon's follower count exploded, topping out around 24,000. And the audience has stuck around, eagerly waiting to smash fav on the hilarious riffs, lefty takes, spot-on memes, and occasional keytar vids from the account that's currently under the handle of Incurrable ACAB Goose (Woggon toys around with variations of “incurrable” and “goose”). No matter what the Goose is calling himself, his elite tweets remain indispensable to the T.C. Twitter scene, and now well beyond.

BEST INSTAGRAM

@Nklokphoto

[instagram.com/nklokphoto](https://www.instagram.com/nklokphoto)

Minnesota Instagram's all about the Up North aesthetic. Big snowy expanses, alien ice formations, rocky outcrops at magic hour, stars, sea smoke, fall foliage, and aurora. Nathan Klok is a pro at all the classics and more. He bobs between the city and the wilderness, using ephemeral light situations to capture well-trod landmarks and unbeaten landscapes with equal intensity and originality. His Minnesota is pristine, vivid, and alive, spacious where you'd expect clutter, an amalgam of beauty and brutality. He's not above hiding in the bushes for the occasional proposal, and seems to be a low-key planespotter. At one point he got a drone and started making long-exposure light paintings with it, which is totally sweet.

Readers' Choice: @sota_eats

BEST TIKTOK CREATOR

Chris Udalla

[tiktok.com/@chrisudalla](https://www.tiktok.com/@chrisudalla)

Chris Udalla is the biggest Minnesota celeb you've never heard of... provided you're over 30. Over 2 million young TikTok users know the 21-year-old University of Minnesota student, who's racked up more than 100 million likes on the frenetic video-based social network. Udalla's snippets—which feature him joking about headlines and tweets, pulling dorky stunts, freestyling skits, or generally just clowning around—mostly clock 100,000-plus views, with several breaking the 1 million mark. Scroll the Elk River native's voluminous, WTF-y page to better understand Gen Z while enjoying some laughs.

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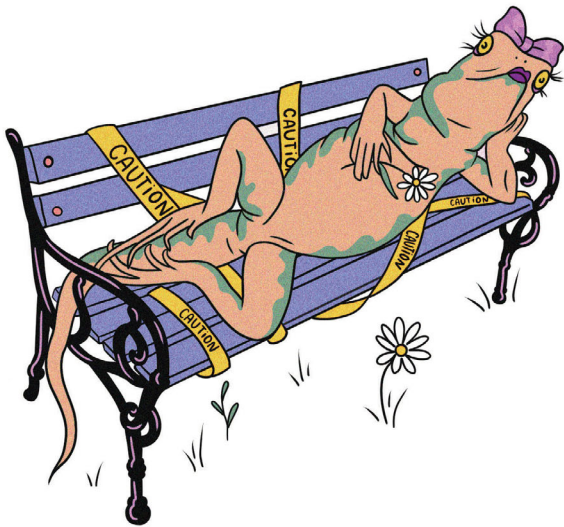
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BEST VIRAL MOMENT

Lil Nas X inspires local tot

The moment was sweet enough already. Sheletta Brundidge, a delightfully bombastic personality at WCCO Radio, has an autistic son named Daniel, who rarely speaks. In early summer 2019, Lil Nas X’s rap-country bop “Old Town Road” was everywhere—including in little Daniel’s earbuds. Brundidge posted a short clip of him singing along, and called it a “miracle.” The moment was not lost on the artist, who called in to WCCO the next week. “Everybody’s destiny is intertwined,” Lil Nas X told Brundidge, who cried. If reading this got “Old Town Road” stuck in your head all over again, we’re not even sorry.



inflatable on its roof. Upon installation, pearls were clutched online by many GOP supporters. “The Saloon lost my business,” typed Pamela on a KARE-11 Facebook post sharing news of the installation. As is the way of the internet, it didn’t take long for a smackdown. “Its [sic] a gay bar Pamela,” one commenter clapped back. And from there, a meme was born. Pamela wasn’t the only clueless Trumpster out there, but timing is everything, and so the interaction will live on in the hearts of local LGBTQ folks and their supporters.

BEST LOCAL MEMES

Fragile Canyons

twitter.com/fragilecanyons

Fragile Canyons is a good rock band. But their lead singer, Andy Engstrom, is an elite meme magician. From the FC social accounts, he whips up delightful takes on extremely local topics, like the time he

casted Twin Cities venues as roles from *The Breakfast Club*. Or his Wolves-themed riffs on the deathless Lake Street Kmart. Or his seizing on Chumbawamba lyrics to celebrate the toppling of racist statues. In fact, a Minnesota Daily profile of Fragile Canyons said the band is “best known” for their online presence, which, in this case, should be taken as a compliment.

BEST MEME

It’s a gay bar, Pamela

Minnesota has its own version of “Okay, Boomer,” and we have Pamela to thank for it. When President Cheeto decided to fart his way through Target Center last fall, nearby bar/nightclub The Saloon decided to host the giant Trump baby

BEST PLACE TO PEOPLE-WATCH

Route 18 Metro Transit bus

Things spotted on Route 18 this year: a man dressed up as Elsa from *Frozen*, a super excited class of kids on their way to a Twins game, a guy twerking his heart out before getting off the bus, two stoners trying to remember if they ever went on a blind date together. Simply put, the 18 is the caviar of people-watching. This sweet ride cruises on Nicollet through downtown, Eat Street, and south Minneapolis, continuing to Rich-

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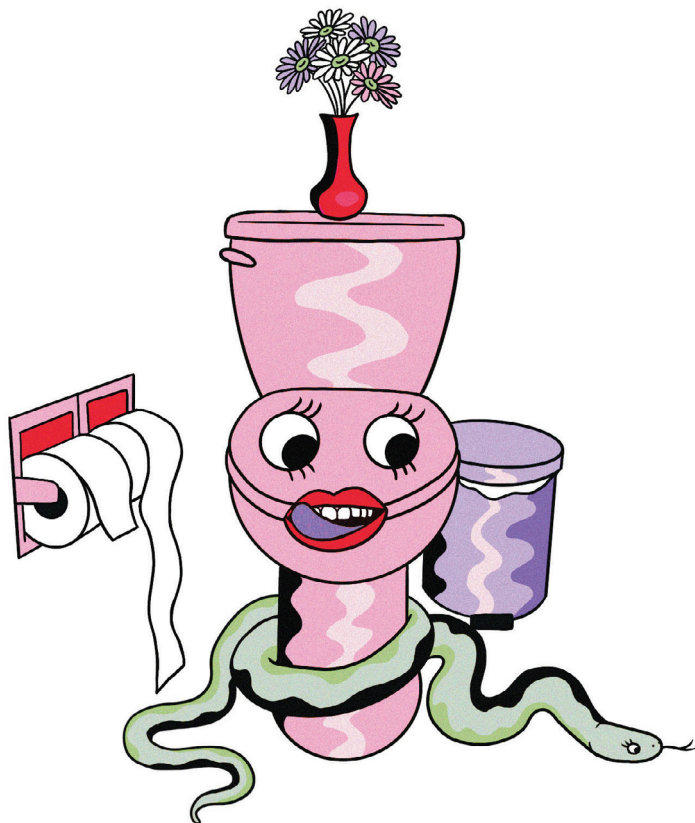


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field and Bloomington. Along the way you get an amazing mix of people: restaurant workers dishing on hot spots, teens with candy-colored hair on their way to Target, MCAD students lugging art supplies, and folks headed to the Government Center with hopes of getting their shit together. Everyone here is just trying to get where they're going, but for one brief moment they're all here for the ride.

Readers' Choice: Minnesota State Fair

BEST SUBURB

Robbinsdale

Birdtown is cute as hell. West Broadway Avenue between 36th and 42nd Avenue is a foodie destination just 10-15 minutes away from downtown Minneapolis. They've got Greek, Italian, Costa Rican, Mexican, and the surreal bacon bacchanal that is Pig Ate My Pizza, which, as you can imagine, serves a killer charcuterie. Meat's in this town's DNA. Hackenmueller butcher shop has been around for more than 120 years, selling burgers to Robbinsdale's founders since before there were cars. A big ol' Hy-Vee currently houses a mini Allina Health clinic and a bar, a great place to meet hunks on a Friday night. Just kidding. But it could be. Why not? The homes are affordable and the property taxes reasonable. It's a completely sound life plan to go Hy-Vee, find a husband, move into McNair

Manor, and enroll the kids in Robbinsdale Area Schools—which boast great music programming. Foolproof, really.

BEST HIPSTER TREND

The death of “hipster”

Around the beginning of the previous decade, a specific archetype emerged of the then-modern hipster. She's listening to Pitchfork bands. She's rocking skinny jeans. She guzzling PBR on a fixie, ironically detached from it all. Then that construct merged with the North Loopian yupster as millennial punks got ad firm jobs, all as pop culture mutated into a decentralized clusterfuck. These days, that stereotype lives on almost exclusively as a tired Boomer punching bag. The notion of hipsterdom this Best Of blurb was created to celebrate/ridicule is dead, but hipsterdom can't ever truly die. It preceded the Jazz Age and (probably) persists today. Go ask some Zoomer on Twitch.

BEST PUBLIC BATHROOM

Varsity Theater

1308 SE Fourth St., Minneapolis
612-217-7701

varsitytheater.com

From the fall of 2016 through the spring of 2018, the Varsity sat mostly empty, a causality of its alleged sex predator then-owner, Jason McLean, scurrying from the



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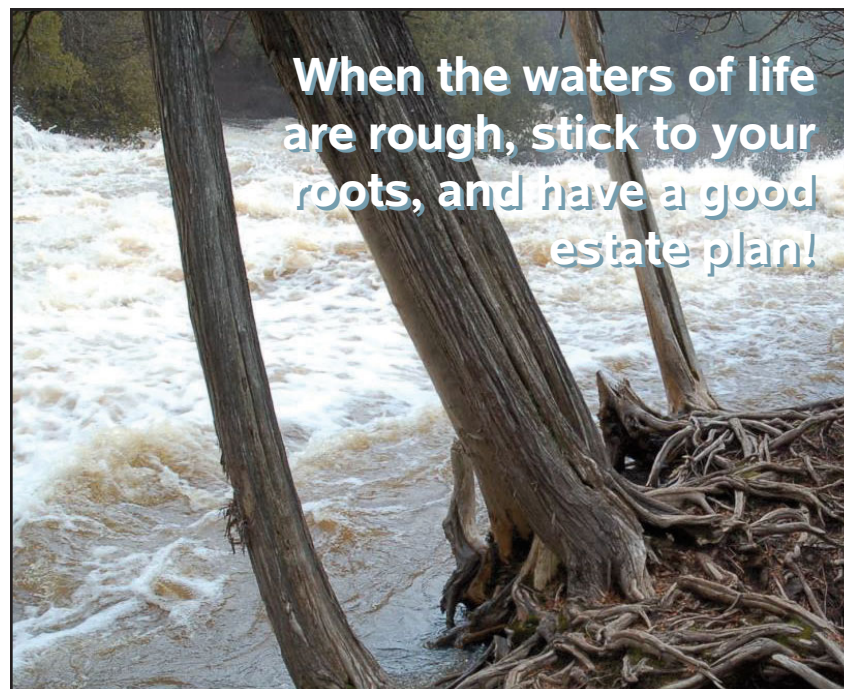
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law. New ownership meant the return of live music to Dinkytown, sure, but it also meant the return of one of the most luxe pissing spots in town. In fact, in 2013, the fantastical, grotto-like bathrooms won the distinction of America's Best Bathrooms from industrial product supplier Cintas Corp. Public bathrooms should be avoided in the age of COVID, though it's nice to know the Twin Cities' fanciest are open for biz once normalcy returns.

BEST PARKING LOT

Sauna Village

4700 Nicollet Ave. S.
612-850-7600

stokeyard.com/saunavillage

What if you took a parking lot and put up a paradise? The lot on 47th and Nicollet is less about car potential and more about what's already parked there: a variety of wood-fired mobile saunas. The Sauna Village opened in 2019 in the dead of winter, encouraging folks to heat up in one of its saunas on wheels. The lot also boasts changing rooms, cold baths, a fire pit, and showers. The endeavor is run by Stokeyard Outfitters, a business formed by John Pederson and Rodney Buhersmith, two self-proclaimed "saunapreneurs" who met while working at 612Sauna. When they're not hosting open sauna nights in the Village, they're driving one of their mobile trailers to parks and other parking lots where they host special pop-up events.

BEST LANDMARK

Grain Belt sign

From 1975 through 2017, that big, beloved beer cap above the Mississippi River sat mostly dark. A year earlier, August Schell Brewing Co., the New Ulm-based brewer of Grain Belt, purchased the sign built in 1941 with plans to relight it and keep it lit, which is exactly what happened. Now, as you enter Northeast from downtown, you're met with the twinkling splendor of "The Friendly Beer," a throwback suds sight that does wonders for the riverfront. The landmark holds additional sway among Hold Steady nerds, having been lyrically immortalized in the 2006 song "Party Pit."

BEST ROAD

Minnehaha Parkway

With all due respect: Eat shit, Central Park. A swath of green cuts through the heart of south Minneapolis, from Lake Harriet to Minnehaha Falls Park, and it's as gloriously bucolic as any natural reprieve from urbanity we're aware of. By car, bike, or kayak, the East-West passageway provides

a lush, laid-back tour of Minneapolis. You can even make it an eating/drinking tour with Wise Acre, Heather's, Italian Eatery, Grand Ole Creamery, Bull's Horn, and Sea Salt. Just don't ever take it for granted.

BEST SIGN OF SPRING

Way too many people on the basketball court

When warm weather finally arrives in Minnesota, in non-COVID times, restaurant patios become packed, dog parks perk up, and everyone tries to get in on a game of b-ball. Normally, pick-up games of basketball are 3-on-3 or 5-on-5, but on that first day of real spring? Pretty much every neighborhood teen/young adult is crammed onto the court of your neighborhood park. If they're not, then they're standing in groups nearby, waiting for an opening to play. Summer and spring (if we even get a spring) are precious, and shooting hoops on an ice-free court is one of the pure joys of sunny weather. We can't wait until courts can become safely crowded again.

BEST LYNX PLAYER

Napheesa Collier

As the Lynx adjusted to life without superstar Maya Moore, rookie Napheesa Collier provided an all-around spark. Collier became just the second rookie in WNBA history to score 400 points, grab 200 rebounds, and get 60 steals in one season, on her way to winning Rookie of the Year honors. Collier was also named to the All-Star Team as an injury replacement, and was voted to the WNBA All-Rookie Team. She was dependable too, averaging more minutes per game than any other Lynx player. Collier immediately formed a formidable partnership with veterans Odyssey Sims and Sylvia Fowles, which could help restore the local dynasty.

Readers' Choice: Maya Moore

BEST TIMBERWOLVES PLAYER

Karl-Anthony Towns

Yes, we gave this award to Karl-Anthony Towns last year. But we don't have... any other choice. KAT is far and away the best player on a consistently underperforming and supremely frustrating team. Any other player who could possibly be considered has either left the team or been traded. The Wolves must now hope that KAT is the type of leader and NBA superstar they can build the team around, and he and his newly assembled crew of unproven players can make a return to the playoffs in the highly competitive Western Conference.



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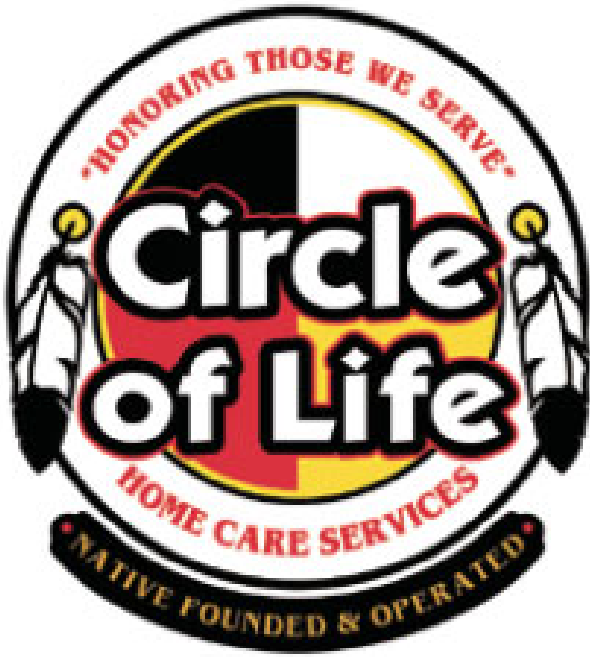
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Talk of the Town

Towns has proven he can indeed do it all for the Wolves, but it becomes a problem if he is the only one who is producing. If KAT wins this award again next year, you'll know the Wolves are still in trouble.

Readers' Choice: Karl-Anthony Towns

BEST SPORTS TEAM

Minnesota Twins

It's easy to paint Minnesota as a scorched and desolate sports landscape, chock full of perpetually hard-luck teams slogging into oblivion. In 2019, in the months before sports and all things fun skidded to a halt, our state actually boasted some winners—the Outback Bowl-winning Gophers, the playoff-appearing Vikings, and the powerhouse prep Minnehaha Academy hoops squad. Most of all, we had the Minnesota Twins mashing dingers at record pace on the way to a 101-61 record. The Yankees reliably ruined everything in the playoffs, but Rocco Baldelli's rookie season as skipper was the type of serotonin marathon local sports nuts had not experienced in recent memory.

Readers' Choice: Minnesota Lynx

BEST WILD PLAYER

Ryan Suter

Has Ryan Suter lived up to the 13-year, \$98 million contract he signed in 2012 to become a member of the Minnesota Wild? Debatable! But this much is certain: The team acquired an ironman. At 35, the defenseman is still logging over 24 minutes per game, always bringing physicality and leadership. Suter has laced up for 1,142 games, which places him 154th all-time and just four spots behind his uncle, Bob Suter. The simultaneous mega-signings of Suter and Minnesota native Zach Parise have not produced any Stanley Cups, but both stars have proven to be consistent, reliable forces on the first line.

Readers' Choice: Zach Parise

BEST TWINS PLAYER

Nelson Cruz

The 2019 Minnesota Twins set an all-time MLB record by hitting 307 home runs. So there are clearly a lot of options for this category on a Central Division-winning team that surprised everyone. But the Bomb Squad had one undisputed leader, and that was Nelson Cruz. He not only led the team with 41 home runs, but the 40-year-old slugger immediately provided a veteran spark that ignited everyone on the team. While the Twins' dream season ended with yet another nightmare loss to

the Yankees in the postseason, the club took everyone on a great ride last year, led by the impressive bat of Cruz, who hit one towering home run after another in a season that was filled with thrilling longballs.

Readers' Choice: Max Kepler

BEST VIKINGS PLAYER

Danielle Hunter

If Danielle Hunter's own jersey can't contain him, what chance do opposing offensive linemen have? Hunter's boulder-ish shoulders and shredded arms look fake, like what an illustrator would attach to a comic-book football player. Any player caught in those limbs is going down. Quarterbacks did that 14.5 times in each of Hunter's last two seasons, and last year the stud defensive end added 16 tackles for loss. Still just 25, the LSU product became the youngest player to hit 50 career sacks in NFL history. Good luck telling a guy like that his shirt doesn't fit.

Readers' Choice: Adam Thielen

BEST MINNESOTA UNITED PLAYER

Ike Opara

A 29-year-old American centerback whose only professional experience came in Major League Soccer isn't the flashiest acquisition. But, in 2019, it was the most important for Minnesota United FC. Overnight, Opara was the key figure in the Loons' much-improved defense, a lithe, 6-foot-2 dart popping attackers' thought balloons just as they appeared. His elegant hustle won Opara MLS Defender of the Year honors for the second time in his career, and MNUFC made its first appearance in the MLS playoffs. Once the season was over, the team signed the criminally undervalued Opara to a multi-year contract with a deserved raise.

BEST COLLEGE ATHLETE

Rashod Bateman

Rashod Bateman enjoyed a nice freshman debut on 2018's run-first Gopher football squad, but the explosive wideout finished his sophomore season with NFL scouts drooling. The 6-foot-2, 210-pound game-breaker snagged 60 balls for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns—an eye-popping average of 20.3 yards per catch. The Georgia native's counterpart, Minneapolis's own Tyler Johnson, will be catching passes from Tom Brady in Tampa Bay this fall

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Talk of the Town

after being selected in the fifth round of April's draft. Fresh off earning third-team AP All-American honors, Bateman is expected to bolt for the pros after this upcoming season, with many early draft prognosticators grading him as a first-rounder. We're just happy to get one more year of one-handed acrobatics from the best wide receiver in the Big 10.

BEST COACH

P.J. Fleck

Any long-suffering Gopher football fan has grown weary of the empty proclamations—Rose Bowls! Big 10 Championships!—of the next new savior of the team. So it took time for the maroon and gold faithful to fully buy into coach P.J. Fleck's unifying rally cry of #RowTheBoat. Fleck started slowly at the U, but during his third season, everything clicked: The team went 11-2, the most wins they've had in a season since 1904. It was the type of campaign that fans had been dreaming of for decades, one that was capped by an Outback Bowl victory over Auburn. Hopefully it won't be an outlier. If Fleck can build on that momentum and enthusiasm, a return to the glory days of the program is within reach.

Readers' Choice: P.J. Fleck

BEST SPORTS FAN

The 2 people inside T.C. Bear

After an apparent disagreement regarding the direction of T.C. Bear, the Twins parted ways with Greg Wilfahrt, who had portrayed the mascot since its inception in 2010, never missing a game. A "pretty thorough" audition process yielded not one but two replacements. Now that baseball is back, these new humans inside the smiley bear costume have the responsibility of goofing around Target Field and posing with kiddos at community events. The Twins organization didn't bestow the honor to rookies, either. Both mega-fans have "collegiate and professional mascotting experience," the Strib reported.

BEST SPORTS HIGHLIGHT

Twins bash 3 HRs to reclaim record

Our Twins and the dreaded Yankees spent the summer of 2019 blasting dongs at historic rates, with New York entering the final game of the regular season with a one home run lead. It wouldn't last. C.J. Cron, Jake Cave, and Jason Castro all went yard against the Royals, giving the Bomb Squad

307 homers on the year—the most ever in an MLB season. The Yankees, per agonizing tradition, would subsequently boot the Twins from the playoffs, but they still can't touch Minnesota's moonshot mastery.

BEST SPORTS TALK RADIO HOST

Paul "Meatsauce" Lambert

The marquee talent at KFAN, Minnesota's insanely popular sports-talk radio frequency, is graying. When either Paul Allen, Dan "Common Man" Cole, or drive-time juggernaut Dan Barreiro decide to step away, it seems logical that Paul "Meatsauce" Lambert is poised for a bigger role. Currently one-third of *The Power Trip Morning Show*, Sauce packs surplus personality. He's the type of Minnesota sports fanatic you'd meet at any dive bar with a 50-inch flatscreen. Lambert might lean into his Chris Farley-ish partyboy persona, but the magnetic FM talker is as savvy with X & Os as he is with yuks.

BEST SPORTSWRITER

Michael Rand

For all its strengths, our parent company, the Star Tribune, has a ways to go when it comes to writing for the internet. If any staffer has captured the slightly ironically detached, audience-grabbing, breezy voice of deeply missed sports blog Deadspin (RIP), it's Michael Rand. The man behind the RandBall blog doesn't barrage readers with analytics wonkery, stenographer play-by-play, or loudmouth takes. Instead, he weaves witty voice into stories that appeal across the spectrum of sports fandom, always entertaining while informing.

BEST TV SPORTSCASTER

Justin Morneau

For the first half of his career, Morneau appeared bound for Cooperstown. Concussions robbed the ex-Twins slugger of his powers, though he's currently enjoying a surprise second act on Fox Sports North as one of the team's best ever color commentators. As a sports yakker, Morneau bucks the stereotypes associated with yolked ex-jocks, delivering lively, deeply insightful, funny, and charming analysis. The 39-year-old Canuck is a natural. And apparently we have his wife to thank: Krista Morneau, annoyed by Justin's hollering at the TV, reportedly encouraged her husband to monetize his killer Twins takes.

Readers' Choice: Randy Shaver

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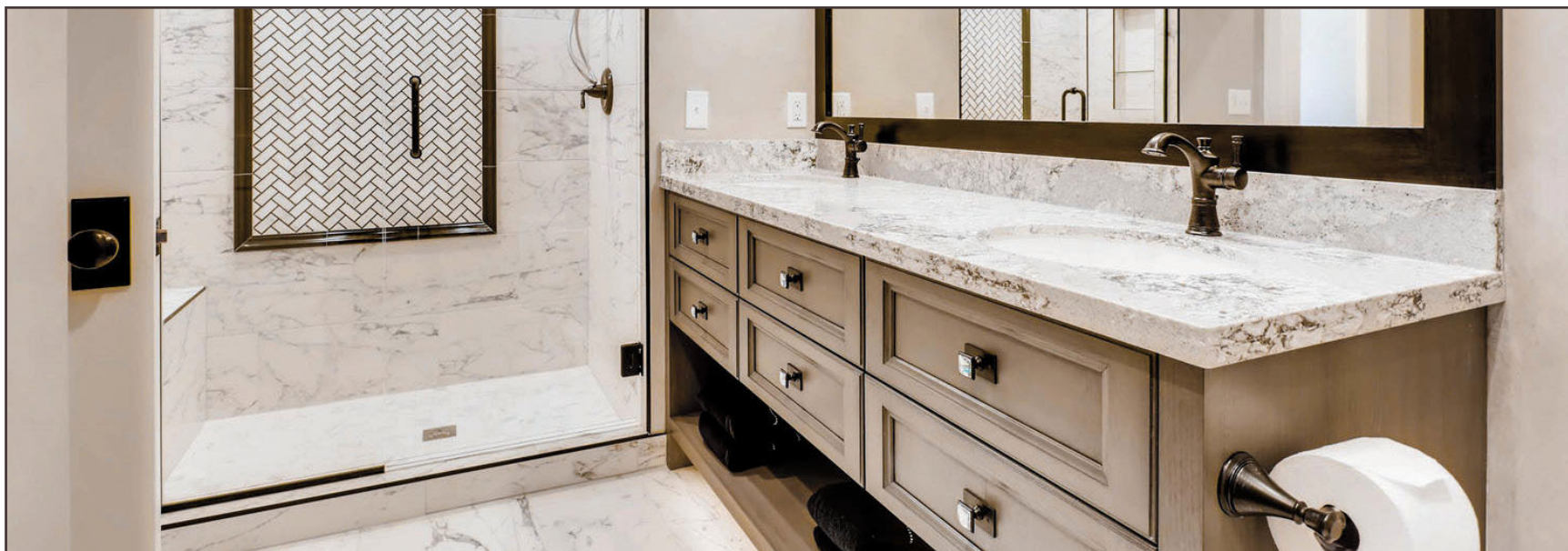
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BEST TV NEWSPERSON

Ian Leonard

Ian Leonard's weather geekery is contagious. As chief meteorologist at Fox 9, he seems to get genuinely jazzed while discussing pressure fronts and cumulus clouds, vibing like a weather-obsessed Bill Nye. Leonard, who beat cancer twice in recent years, is also a good guy, having helped raise millions for Special Olympics Minnesota; the kinetic weatherman has taken over 100 icy jumps as part of the Polar Plunge charity event. Leonard may be an adoptive Minnestoan, but anyone who's witnessed one of his giddy State Fair broadcasts can confirm he's fully immersed in our state's culture.

Readers' Choice: Jana Shortal

BEST TV STATION

TPT

tpt.org

City Pages fully supports brain-rotting TV escapism like *Too Hot to Handle*, the Netflix dating show where sexy, drunk contestants win by not fucking. When it comes to eat-

your-vegetables programming, however, the Twin Cities are fortunate to have TPT, our PBS affiliate that brings prestige national shows (*Frontline*, *Antiques Roadshow*) as well as knockout locally produced ones. That latter category includes news (*Almanac*), history (*Lost Twin Cities*, *Minnesota Experience*), and the arts (*MNO*). When you're done binging *Fuller House*, click over to TPT and restore some brain cells while remaining entertained in quarantine.

Readers' Choice: KARE 11

BEST COMMERCIAL

Winona Ryder's Super Bowl ad

OK, look: Winona Ryder's Super Bowl ad for Squarespace is bad. One could even charge—and the native Minnesotan writing this sentence absolutely will!—that it was offensively bad, relying on dated *Fargo* accents to drive home the fact that even flyover dumbasses like us can manage to build a website with Squarespace. In it, we see Winona, who we love endlessly for her considerable talent and unbeatable home state, lying beneath a snowbank with a laptop in her namesake hometown,

fielding questions from some yokel cop. It's sO rAnDoM. Anyway, this is the Best Of issue, and to that end, this ad is actually the best because it satisfies our state's unquenchable thirst to get noticed... even if we ruthlessly critique how it's done.

BEST WAY TO GET FLIPPED THE BIRD

Legally changing lanes

Do you have somewhere to be? Does everyone else around you have places to be? Naturally, the sanest way to make sure everybody gets where they're going in seamless social transit is to flash the signal and merge into an open lane. Oh, but the driver some ways behind you sees what you're trying to do, and they're going to take it personally. If you want to merge, you're going to have to do it in front of someone else, because changing lanes is the same as cutting in line, which is anarchy writ small in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. "Stay in your lane!" that driver cannot help but think, projecting an impulse to police other people formed over a lifetime of nonconfrontational grudge-

holding disguised as Midwestern politeness. You don't care. You know the law. You're not going to miss your exit and burn fuel circling the interstate, enabling psychopaths. You merge. They honk—incensed, indignant, zooming ahead to get a good look at your face in order to confirm some racial or gender-specific speculation. You don't care. You're at peace with your god.

BEST CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Dayton's

For much of last year, the Dayton's department store project in downtown Minneapolis had a very real impact on all of our lives. Not because we were particularly excited for the end result, but because it had a choke point on the skyway between the IDS Center and Target. Usually it meant having to go... outside. Where there's weather. And pigeons. When portions finally reopened in January, it was with a collective cry of relief from downtown Minneapolis Redditors. Now the skyway is clear once again, and we can go back to living like mole people once the farmers markets and food trucks go into hibernation.



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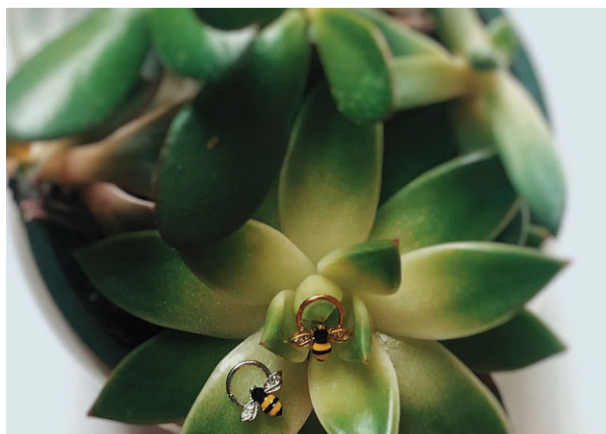
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The social media platform you simply can't stop scrolling (despite your best intentions) is the best place to buy unique jewelry from Twin Cities artists. While many vendors sell their wares at local retail stores, or hold pop-ups at gift markets and collective sales, the best way to see what your favorite designers are working on is to hit that follow button. You can find everything from polymer clay earrings that give back to local teachers (On the Shelf Jewelry; @ontheshelf_jewelry) to zodiac-inspired pieces (Las Ranas Jewelry; @lasransjewelry) to fun and cheeky pins to give your favorite jackets a little extra zing (Gigi's Flair Emporium; @gigisflairemporium) via the 'gram, and new designs and lines are popping up every day.

Readers' Choice: Patina

BEST THRIFT STORE

St. Vincent De Paul

461 W. Seventh St., St. Paul; 2939 12th Ave. S., Minneapolis
651-227-1332; 612-722-7882
svdpmpls.org

Besides the free day-old bread, the surprisingly vast furniture selection, and a painted portrait of St. Vincent himself—smiling beatifically and prominently labeled “not for sale”—the book section in the back of the Lake Street-adjacent St. Vinny's is better curated than some used bookstores. When the store reopens this summer, marvel at the selection of pulpy paperbacks, art books, and unclassifiable printed ephemera.

Readers' Choice: Arc's Value Village

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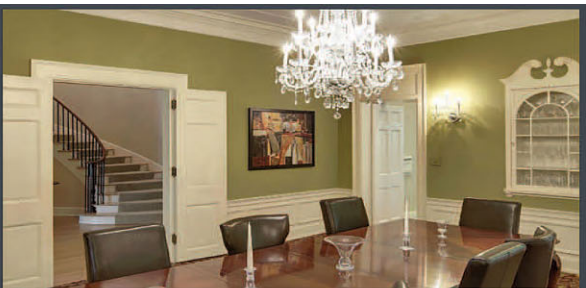


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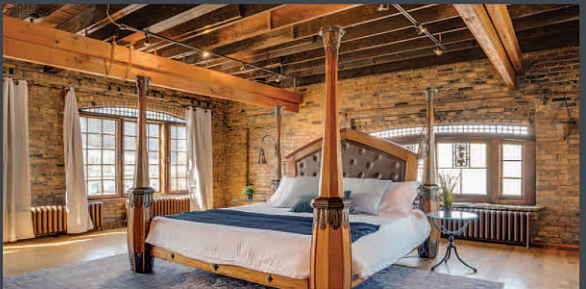
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BEST TATTOO PARLOR

Northeast Tattoo

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612-788-4100

You've likely passed the eye-catching "Welcome to Northeast Minneapolis" mural at Lowry and Central Avenues before—perhaps on your way to drink a few at Fair State? Were you to turn down that stretch of Lowry, you'd see the robin's-egg-blue building that houses Northeast Tattoo. They're the shop that made that mural for the community, and the work coming out of here is every bit as visually grabbing: bold and colorful traditional Americana, black-and-gray pieces with impossibly intricate shading, small little keepsake pieces visible only to a select few. These artists are good at what they do, and they do it in a way that makes you feel comfortable and cared-for.

Readers' Choice: Saint Sabrina's

BEST MECHANIC

Good Carma

614 NE Lowry Ave., Minneapolis
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If you have an out-of-warranty Volkswagen, Audi, or Subaru, chances are you've at least heard of Good Carma. It's not the cheapest place, nor do they have the most expansive hours. But the quality of the work is worth it, especially for major repairs. The staff is honest and upfront about costs, and/or whether something's even worth fixing. They also do consultations to help you decide whether a used car purchase is a good deal. While you wait on routine maintenance, forget drinking cold sludge in a dull waiting area; head across the street to Carma Cafe, their coffee shop, for a proper cup (or tea or a smoothie!) and a bite to eat.

BEST PLACE TO BUY VINYL

SolSta Records

4022 E. 46th St., Minneapolis
612-916-0990

solstarecords.com

This small but well-stocked Longfellow record shop first caught the attention of Twin Cities vinyl aficionados back when it

opened as Solid State Vinyl in 2016. Nothing much changed once it rebranded as SolSta Records, thankfully, as Hannah and Phil Borreson continue to provide a well-curated selection of new and used records through the store and their ultra-convenient online shop. SolSta celebrates artists of all kinds, and regularly hosts photo and art exhibitions. They also (usually!) host intimate music performances as well, fostering a sense of community that goes well beyond just being a fantastic place to shop.

Readers' Choice: Electric Fetus

BEST GREEN BUSINESS

Mighty Axe Hops

8505 95th St. NE, Foley
952-201-4227

mightyaxehops.com

Mighty Axe Hops just north of St. Cloud boasts 80 acres of Minnesota-grown hops used in Minnesota-made beer. Most hops that supply Minnesota's beer industry are trucked in from the Pacific Northwest, creating an amount of greenhouse gas emissions that, once you're aware of it, distracts from the taste. Against quite incredible odds—a cruelly short growing season exacerbated by increasing precipitation due to climate change—Eric Sannerud and Ben Boo have revived the hop tradition of the Midwest, which grew a sizable portion of the world's supply in pre-Prohibition times. Breweries that use Mighty Axe hops to create farm-to-table Minnesota beers include Wicked Wort, Fair State, Bauhaus, HeadFlyer, Beaver Island, and Dangerous Man.

BEST DAY TRIP

LaCrosse, Wisconsin

explorelacrosse.com

Some weekends, getting out of the Twin Cities, even if it's just for a few hours, is like a breath of fresh air. Consider a little road trip to LaCrosse, a destination that's as much fun to get to as it is to be in. Along your route, you'll find plenty of stops to make, whether that's taking sips at one of the many wineries in the area, scoring squeaky-fresh cheese curds from a ma-and-pop shop, or posing with the world's largest six-pack of beer at the edge of town for the 'gram. Regardless of the season, there is plenty to do outdoors; try ice fishing, biking, or canoeing your way through the day. Big events throughout the year include music fests, holiday lights tours, and studio gallery crawls. A roundtrip should take you about five hours, total, meaning you can take a mini-vacay and resume life as usual in less than a day.



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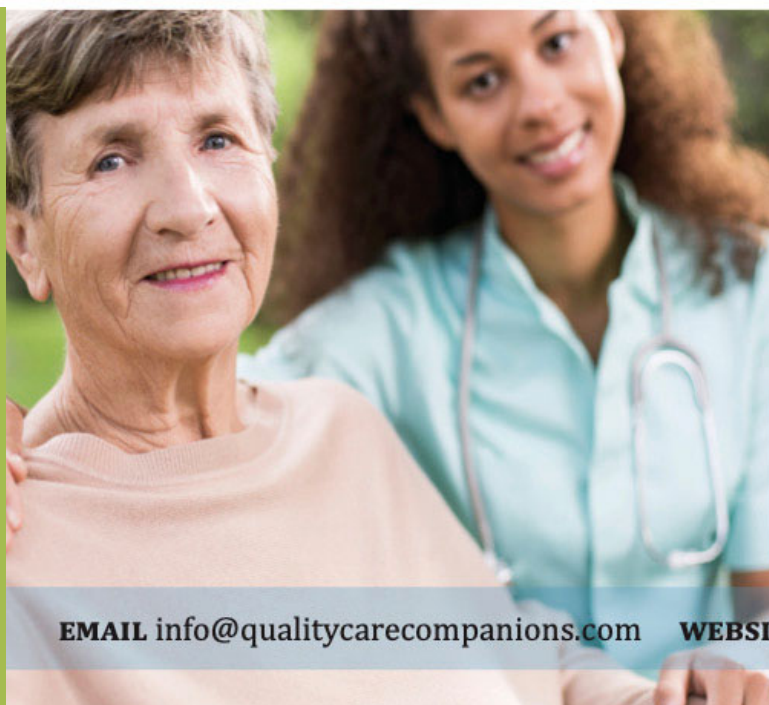
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36 W. 66th St., Richfield
612-798-7960

These days, strip malls are more like lavish, manufactured town squares where well-heeled folks gather for basic brunch on Capitalism Corner. That's what makes it easy to love an OG strip mall like the Hub, one of the oldest in the Twin Cities. Sure, it's dated and the parking lot is the pits. But as every other store and space around town gets swiftly turned into a millennial gift box ready for Instagram, the Hub promises old-school magic: Walgreens, Game Stop, Michael's, Golden Tobacco, Dollar Tree. Where else can you grab a vape pen, Mario Kart, and plenty of plastic leaves for your seasonal fall wreaths?

BEST MALL

Rosedale Center

1595 Hwy. 36 W., Roseville
651-633-0872
rosedalecenter.com

How do you distinguish yourself as a shop-

ping mall in a world where shopping malls are dying, and in a state literally known for the one very large shopping mall? To Rosedale's credit, it keeps finding new ways—mostly by inviting in the weird, the new, and the exciting. That means setting up a catwalk for a fleet of glittering drag queens, moving in the infamous Haunted Basement, installing a massive, glittering moose sculpture studded with Christmas lights in time for the holidays, and hey, why not throw in a real live mermaid? (Its SeaQuest aquarium boasts about a half-dozen.) Rosedale is staying alive by pushing the boundaries of what a shopping mall can be, and who it can be for.

BEST VINTAGE SHOP

Arlee Park

3000 E. 50th St., Minneapolis
arleepark.com

Twin sisters Ashley and Jamie have great taste and a passion for vintage and second-hand items. Arlee Park started as an Etsy shop in 2016 and expanded to brick and mortar in 2017. The store is a haven for vintage lovers and secondhand newbies

alike; you can start your vintage collection with a brass bird, a pair of cutoff Levi's, or splurge on a pristine '70s sofa, wool rug, or oil painting. Shopping secondhand is a great way to liven up your space (or closet) while making less of an impact on the environment, and Arlee Park is a great place to do it. (They also regularly pop up at the Minneapolis Vintage Market.)

Readers' Choice: Rewind

BEST FESTIVAL

Monarch Festival

monarchfestival.org

This year we can be especially jealous of, as well as impressed by, the Minnesota-to-Mexico migration undertaken each fall by monarch butterflies. The multicultural festival celebrating the 2,300-mile journey of these magnificent *mariposas* won't be taking place this September, but bilingual online events throughout the summer are featuring some of the artists, authors, chefs, and science experts we hope to see in person in 2021. When the fest does return to the lovely shores of Lake Nokomis, there will be music and

dance performances, chances to create screenprints and other art, stilt walkers in giant butterfly wings, an adorable kids' costume contest, and some of the best tacos, tamales, and elote in town.

Readers' Choice: Twin Cities Pride

BEST FREE EVENT/ACTIVITY

Twin Cities Book Festival

twincitiesbookfestival.com

For the past 19 years, literary organization Rain Taxi has been throwing a book party open to all. Traditionally hosted in the fall, the Twin Cities Book Festival brings in both authors from around the world and local talents from around the corner for a day of readings, talks, workshops, and happy hours. Past years' stacked lineups have included Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, science writer Mary Roach, home chef/Julia Child fan Julie Powell, memoirist Cheryl Strayed, and Afrofuturist Marlon James. Festivities also include events for kids and teens, a new and used book sale, and other fun hosted by Twin Cities literary organizations. This year's (virtual) festival is scheduled to start October 15.

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BEST PLACE TO BUY A GIFT

Victory Vintage

3505 W. 44th St., Minneapolis
612-926-8200
shopvictory.com

Gifting gets boring when you grow up, mostly because objects suddenly stop being magical. Toys are no longer alive, and all you really want is to somehow get out of your crushing student loan debt. But Victory Vintage, a little nook tucked into Linden Hills, brings back some of that enchantment. Walking into the boutique feels a little like walking into an *I Spy* book, but if everything was satisfyingly sorted and displayed by color. Here you'll find glittery raven ornaments, vintage baubles, porcelain, taxidermy, strange, musky candles—the shop is small, but it's easy to get lost in its curated esoterica. Come looking for a present and leave with something you didn't know you wanted.

Readers' Choice: Patina

BEST PET STORE

Twin Cities Reptiles

2363 University Ave. W., St. Paul
651-647-4479
twincitiesreptiles.net

We don't care if you have a turtle or a pit bull. Twin Cities Reptiles, just off the Green Line in St. Paul, is one of the oldest specialty reptile stores out there, and it's the place for you. You'll find everything you need in the front of the store, but we highly encourage you to venture into the back first, where you will meet a menagerie of frogs, lizards, spiders, and snakes of all kinds and colors. Some are as big as your pinky, others are the size of a toddler. They're all going to make your cat-food run way cooler than usual. If you've got a question, the chill, animal-loving staff will be happy to assist.

BEST SALON/SPA

Haus Salon

730 N. Washington Ave., 4240 Nicollet Ave., 309 First Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-827-4287
haussalon.com

The Haus salon empire continues to expand, with locations in south Minneapolis, the North Loop, and Northeast. You can expect the same talented stylists and estheticians, art-inspired interiors, and welcoming, creative energy at all three, though each Haus spot has its own signature magic. Book a hair appointment at the plant-filled, airy Northeast spot and treat yourself to a fancy facial while you're at it and you'll understand. Haus's stylists

have honed their skills everywhere from New York Fashion Week to the North American Hairstyling Awards (basically the Oscars for hair), and they're just as adept at a simple cut as they are with out-there fashion color.

Readers' Choice: Juut

BEST HAIRCUT

Cocoon Salon

861 E. Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis
612-839-1690
cocoonmsp.com

Have you been coveting a trendy, '70s-inspired shag haircut? Cocoon is the place to go for a glam shag or whatever else you're envisioning when it comes to your cut. This small, bright, and airy salon is home to a handful of super cool stylists who have years of experience and heaps of talent. Stylists are independent, which means they set their own schedules and get creative freedom to express themselves. Whether you're making a major chop or just need to polish off split ends, a visit to Cocoon will leave you transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

BEST PLACE TO BUY FURNITURE

Southside Vintage

1832 E. 42nd St., Minneapolis
612-250-0977
southsidevintage.com

Southside Vintage, an "occasional" store open every other weekend, rightly describes itself as "stylish and affordable." The shop owned by stylist and set decorator Susan Calvit reflects her incredible eye. Southside's packed with treasures, from mid-century modern dining tables and dressers, to tiki furniture, to couches that look like they came straight from your grandma's house in 1965. If you're redecorating or furnishing on a budget and aren't a fan of Ikea, aesthetically or otherwise, Southside Vintage is the spot for you.

BEST CLOTHING STORE FOR WOMEN

Mille

4760 Grand Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-209-7364
shopmille.com

When local women's boutique Mille released an in-house collection of simple, flowy dresses, tops, and skirts in breathable, packable cottons, it was a risk—a risk that paid off. The store, which previously

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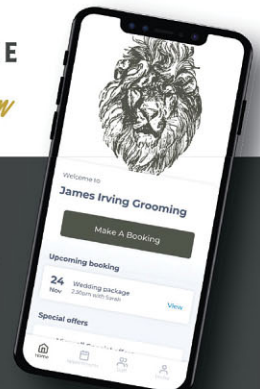
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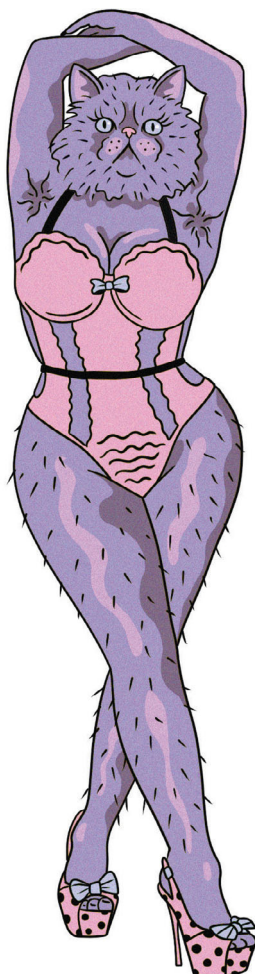
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stocked bands like Rachel Antonoff, now carries mostly its own line, and shoppers are loving each seasonal drop. Even the famous fashion designing Rodarte sisters are fans! Mille's designs are wearable, versatile, and ready for the beach, a vacation somewhere warm, or just a walk around Lake of the Isles, and the store itself is a welcoming jewel box with a Paris-meets-Los Angeles vibe.

BEST CLOTHING STORE FOR MEN

Target

Multiple locations
target.com

Traditionally, this title goes to high-end boutiques. This year, it's time to celebrate the best stop for dudes looking to dress like adults without breaking their budgets. The Scarlet Bullseye features the best price-to-quality ratio in town on basic T-shirts (\$6, go with V-necks) and a great range of basic-casual offerings for frugal cube rats. Stay away from the footwear department (most of their shoes will fall apart in a season), but do check out the activewear offerings for affordable base

layer options. And if you need cut-off jorts for the summer—trust us: you do—just snag a \$30 pair of jeans from the Goodfellow line and grab some scissors.

BEST LINGERIE STORE

Nordstrom

Ridgedale Center; Mall of America
651-900-6800; 952-883-2121
nordstrom.com

Stay with us here. If you want an everyday bra that actually fits and doesn't drive you insane, don't waste your time with those direct-to-consumer sites but instead head to Nordstrom—Ridgedale or MOA, it doesn't matter. There, you'll find the experts you seek, the women who can size you up and get you in a bra that lifts, separates, supports, and all that good stuff. Is it awkward hanging out topless in a fitting room with one of these bra geniuses? Absolutely not. They've seen it all before. Let them guide you, and treat yourself to something fun from lines like Hanky Panky and Free People while you're at it.

Readers' Choice: The Smitten Kitten

BEST BOUTIQUE

Parc

212 N. Second St. #102, Minneapolis
612-353-4966
parcboutique.com

Parc has had a few identities since its early days on Hennepin in Northeast, when it sold men's and womenswear from lines like J. Brand and BB Dakota. After a few years, the shop transformed into a modern, minimal spot for cool girls, and opened a pop-up on 50th and France in Edina. These days, Parc calls the North Loop home, and brings in buzzy lines you can't find anywhere else in the Twin Cities, including Paloma Wool, Amomento, and Donni. The racks are never overflowing, but rather thoughtfully curated and ready to bring a piece of Parc's signature sophisticated ease to your wardrobe. Don't miss their Friday Sip and Shop happy hour events.

Readers' Choice: Patina

BEST MINI GOLF

Centennial Lakes Park

7499 France Ave. S., Edina
952-833-9580

How many retail complexes and gaudy excuses for mini-malls can fit within a stretch of France Avenue? Hidden behind businesses like Q. Cumbers and Chuck E. Cheese, past the parking structures, the Centennial Lakes Putting Course is an 18-hole tour de force. Void of the

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decorative quirks of mini-golf and the stuffiness of your traditional tee times, Centennial Lakes mashes up both worlds for a fun experience. Putting here feels like playing the mini-golf equivalent of a PGA tournament-styled course.

BEST BOWLING ALLEY

Elsie's

729 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis
612-378-9701
elsies.com

The world of first-ring suburban bowling alleys is ever-changing, each place bigger and broader than the last. Elsie's has all the glamour and glitz of those fancy-schmancy bowling alleys but still fits perfectly in its northeast Minneapolis hood. With 16 lanes and cosmic bowling every weekend, Elsie's is welcoming, spacious, and economically friendly. They've reopened with strict new precautions to keep locals bowling safely.

Readers' Choice: Bryant-Lake Bowl

BEST PLACE TO SHOOT POOL

Al's Billiards

1319 Larpenteur Ave. W., Roseville
651-340-8845

As the landscape continues to shift and evolve in the 'burbs, places to shoot pool can get noisier and rambunctious, especially when food and alcohol are involved. Enter Al's Billiards, the quaint, alcohol-free, pay-by-the-hour pool hall on Lexington and Larpenteur in Roseville. Equal parts homely and relaxing, Al's is a simple getaway where one can focus on the cue ball. Kids play free on Sunday (provided they're with an adult), and Wednesday, "ladies day," is free for women.

Readers' Choice: CC Club

BEST CASINO

Treasure Island

5734 Sturgeon Lake Rd., Welch
800-222-7077
ticasino.com

It might take more than gambling to lure Twin Citians a 45-minute drive away, and Treasure Island seems to know this. With a 3,000-seat indoor venue and a new outdoor amphitheater that can accommodate 16,000, the casino is pulling in some big-name shows, notably Janet Jackson last September for a tour-kickoff concert where she was joined onstage by Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. Other distractions include a bowling alley, golf course, and arcade. The gaming floors are vast enough to get lost in, with some areas sleek and modern, others vintage, faux-European, and charmingly

hokey. There are also several restaurants, nine bars and lounges, and a pool with a swim-up bar (indoors of course). There's even a marina with access to the Mississippi River and, in better times, meal cruises on the casino's boat. This Treasure Island ain't Vegas, but it'll do.

Readers' Choice: Mystic Lake

BEST GAMING SHOP

Source Comics & Games

2057 Snelling Ave. N., Roseville
651-645-0386
sourcecomicsandgames.com

Who needs to listen to City Pages when you could just get the word straight from Nur-D? (With that name, assume he knows his stuff.) When City Pages met the budding local rap talent and our 2019 Picked to Click winner, Nur-D was shopping at Source, which he called his "natural habitat." It's been that for lots of other proud geeks for years. (Check our past readers' choice winners lists.) This year, Source can't let its fans hang out and game against each other, but is open for limited in-person shopping, curbside pickup if you call ahead, and through an online store offering same-day delivery (!) if your order's in before 5 p.m.

Readers' Choice: GameStop

BEST HEAD SHOP

Lickety Split

251 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-333-0599
licketysplit.net

"Wait!" you're crying. "Lickety Split is an adult store! That's... a different kind of 'head' shop altogether!" And yes, you'd be right: Lickety Split is most well known for its array of sexy DVDs, condoms, bondage gear, and cute little vibrating things. But they've also got a pretty great selection of grinders, bongs, pipes, and cute little blazing things! Plus the prices are really good, too good for that convenient downtown Minneapolis address. More like Lickety Spliff, right folks? (Ope, we just learned that Lickety Split has closed. We now recommend fashioning your own pipe from an aluminum can.)

Readers' Choice: Electric Fetus

BEST ADULT STORE

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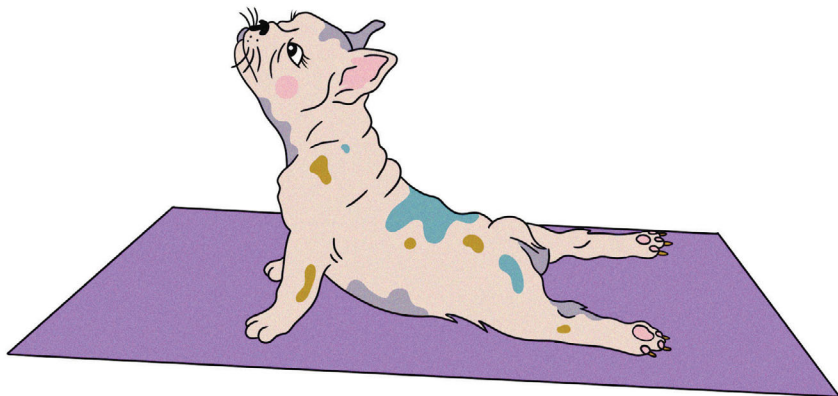


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favorite exotic dancers find their alluring, minimal attire? Until recently, many of them shopped at Venus Unveiled, the city's premier purveyor of sexy stripper outfits in all sizes, including a huge array of towering platform shoes. Now this Black-owned business (located on an adult-store-friendly Lake and Lyndale block that also houses Bondesque and the Smitten Kitten) is working to rebuild and reopen after suffering looting and extensive damage in the riots following George Floyd's murder. It's evident that customers and others care about this little shop: A GoFundMe has raised over \$30,000 of a \$50,000 goal.

BEST TOY STORE

Brickmania

1618 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-584-3627
brickmania.com

Although they seem fine with medieval weaponry and laser guns, LEGO's corporate policy forbids publishing kits that feature real-life slug-throwers or wartime equipment. So what's a fan of both locking-brick building toys and the military-industrial complex to do? Head to Brickmania! Founded in 1999 and headquartered in the Thorp Building in northeast Minneapolis, Brickmania sources secondhand bricks, repainting and repackaging them into kits that recreate everything from World War I triplanes to modern Blackhawk helicopters. Even if you're not their target audience, a tour through the store to check out the enormous displays of snapped-together art and chat with their deeply knowledgeable staff is a fun way to pass the time.

BEST PLACE TO DO YOGA

Modo Yoga

3252 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-920-3004
modoyoga.com/minneapolis

A place this friggin' cold oughta be lousy

with hot yoga options. As it happens, it's not. Trust the friendly folks at Modo to help you keep (or search for) your sanity during the long winter months. All body shapes and skill levels are welcome here. A chain that started in Canada, Modo is all about being sustainable and giving back to the community, and lives up to that mission through charity and volunteer work. Get started now with the free online classes they're offering during quarantine.

Readers' Choice: CorePower

BEST GYM

Phillips Community Center

2323 11th Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-370-4946

For \$10 a month, you get unlimited access to the gym at this city-run facility, including group classes and/or personal training. (Try beating that price!) Even better: Phillips has the city's first and only indoor public swimming pools, which can be accessed for \$45 a month (\$30 if you live in the neighborhood) or \$129 (\$83 for locals) seasonally. Trying to teach your kid(s) to swim and/or get them off the couch? Children 12 and under swim free, and you can bring up to four per trip. If you'd rather do laps alone but need to keep the kids occupied, schedule your swim around a ton of free youth activities.

Readers' Choice: Life Time Fitness

BEST DOG PARK

Airport Dog Park

6040 28th Ave. S., Bloomington

There are lots of things to love about Airport Dog Park, and it's terribly basic name is just one of them. Another is that it's not an official city-regulated park, and is instead owned by the Metropolitan Airport Commission. But just as there are no trash cans or permit requirements, there is ample space for you and your furry pal to truly be free. While there's a more wooded area for sniffing and



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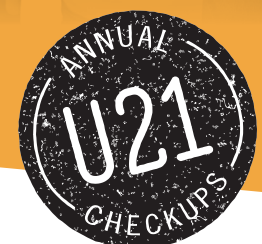
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snuffling, the open field is a great spot for dogs to get their zips out beneath rumbling, sunlit flying machines in the sky.

BEST PUBLIC PARK

Marshall Terrace Park

2740 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis
612-230-6400

minneapolis-parks.org

This park's got basketball hoops, volleyball courts, a wading pool, a baseball diamond, and a playground, though there are likely nicer versions to be found elsewhere. The little tree-lined walking/running path is a peaceful (and shady!) route to get some steps in, and for some reason we can't figure out, you've got decent odds of more or less having the park to yourself and whoever you bring. The real glint on this diamond in the rough is its adjacency to the Mississippi River, which lies just a few wooded steps away. Go in early spring for top-shelf bird-watching, especially of the dozens of great blue herons that have an island rookery smack dab in the middle of the river.

Readers' Choice: Minnehaha Falls

BEST BEACH

Lake Nokomis Main Beach

5001 W. Lake Nokomis Pkwy.,
Minneapolis
612-230-6400

minneapolis-parks.org

The beach is a place to relax. Why mess with that vibe by lugging a heavy cooler around? At Nokomis you can kick back on the large sand beach or surrounding grassy expanse, take a dip when the mood strikes, and get your refreshment needs met at the Doug Flicker-led Sandcastle, which turns out offerings like a fried chicken salad and a kimchee rice bowl that are better than anything you'd pack in your picnic basket. Right now it's takeout only, and customers are reminded to stay "6 feet (or 12 beers) apart." Please remember the same on the sand and in the water.

Readers' Choice: Lake Nokomis

BEST PLACE TO ICE SKATE

Loring Park

1382 Willow St., Minneapolis
mpls-downtown-winterskate

Landscape architects know that a skating rink adds beauty to any urban setting, and this one in an already lovely wintertime surrounding makes Loring Park downright idyllic. From late November through early March, the refrigerated WinterSkate rink offers a big warming house with free skate rentals, and an events calendar including lessons, fitness skates, even a Drag Queen Skate Night. The park is especially pretty on evenings during the pre-Christmas bustle of Holidazzle, when colored lights are copiously strung (and you can enjoy a beer after your rink session just steps away!), but there's also real charm to a lonely late-January afternoon, when it might be just a few flirty teens showing off, or a family whose members are all trying out the ice for the first time.

Readers' Choice: Centennial Lakes

BEST BIKE RIDE

The Gateway State Trail to Stillwater

198 Cayuga St., St. Paul

Hop on the Gateway State Trail in St. Paul and you've got a relaxed morning of smooth

trail, nearly flat elevation, and gorgeous scenery to look forward to. Like most of the good biking infrastructure in the area, the Gateway's a converted railroad right-of-way, and it winds past 18 miles of pretty lakes, over wooden bridges and birch groves. Toward the end, split off onto Brown's Creek State Trail and coast downhill into Stillwater, where you can recover your calories and hydration with a burger and beer. Just don't stuff your belly too full; you'll have to haul all that excess weight back up the river valley on your way home.

BEST VIEW

Mendota Bridge

Rare is the place where you can see both cities' skylines side by side, but the pedestrian and bike path on the westbound side of the Mendota Bridge over the Minnesota River gives you that very vantage point. The downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis loom in the distance, looking like the twins they're supposed to be, and the whole valley opens up around you. If you can block out the 70 mile-an-hour traffic





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a few feet away on Highway 62, it's one of the most pleasant sights in town.

BEST PLACE TO TAKE OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS

Any bike path in town

Minneapolis is one of the most bikeable cities in the nation. So when you have guests in town, show them why. No matter your visitors' interests or skill set, there's probably a bike adventure that's right up their alley. Nature lover? Wheel around Lake Harriet with pit stops at the beach and lunch at Bread & Pickle (bonus points if you visit the nearby gardens). Do they love sports? Hit the North Cedar Lake trail and stop at La Doña Cervecería to watch a soccer game, or keep on truckin' to Target Field. Coffee lovers might get a kick out of drinking brew directly on the Greenway at Freewheel Bike, while beer lovers can explore a few Northeast breweries with a little route planning. Go with a Nice Ride rental so you can abandon your ride and call a Lyft if jet lag kicks in.

Readers' Choice: Minneapolis

BEST OUTDOOR STORE

Repair Lair

3304 E. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-729-9095
repairlair.com

The world's on fire and consumer culture is pouring on the gasoline. Make 2020 the year you relearn the ancient art of getting shit fixed instead of chucking it in the dumpster and ordering a next-day replacement from Amazon. Repair Lair is here to get your tents, waterproof equipment, jackets, sleeping bags, and backpacks back in working order. The staff—among them an M.A. in apparel product development and a former Antarctic ice core driller—are experts in the rugged needs of those who play hard in all of Minnesota's seasons. They'll be straight with you about how much a repair will cost and how long it'll last. And when your gear finally, truly does fall apart, their gently used consignment stock has you covered.

Readers' Choice: REI

BEST GARDEN CENTER

Tonkadale Greenhouse

3739 Tonkawood Rd., Minnetonka
952-938-6480
tonkadale.com

There's a certain emerging Instagram aesthetic it seems everyone is angling toward: bright spaces, clean white lines, spotless surfaces. Of course, none of that is really

“new.” What's newer is the waxy green leaves bursting from ceramic pots, plastic cups, mugs—any vessel that can contain them—the only unruly thing in the room. If you've found yourself suddenly influenced (perhaps you have a green thumb after all!), you should take yourself to Tonkadale. Heart leaf ferns might spruce up that dusty corner! Or perhaps a twisted cactus, reaching up from its new home in the sun? Maybe even a massive monstera, if you don't mind being outshined by the non-mammals dwelling in your home. All the striped, spotted, twisty, curly—and dare we say cute?—plant life you could want is thriving in this Minnetonka greenery wonderland.

BEST NEW BUILDING

Minnehaha Academy

3100 W. River Pkwy., Minneapolis

In August 2017, a natural gas explosion leveled a portion of the Minnehaha Academy upper school campus, killing two employees. The new campus opened this past year to acclaim from alumni, students, and neighbors. Built using red brick—each one hand-fired by a Danish manufacturing firm in operation since 1791—the new campus manages to impart both a stately collegiate quality and a contemporary, forward-looking sense of lightness and space.

BEST HOTEL

Celeste

26 E. Exchange St., St. Paul
651-222-0848
celestepaul.com

A stately hotel with beautifully decorated rooms in a fabulous location doesn't need a charming backstory. This one's got one anyway: Celeste sprung up in the building formerly occupied as both a convent and a music conservatory, and takes its name from its original mother superior. Some rooms boast views out onto the Capitol, while the Xcel Center and Mississippi River are short walks away. Convince a friend to stay there for an excuse to check out Celeste's classy little cocktail bar.

Readers' Choice: The Hewing

BEST POOL

Edina Aquatic Center

4300 W. 66th St., Edina
952-833-9560
edinamn.gov/156/aquatic-center

Why is the metro's least ragtag municipality home to a pirate-themed pool? Because our world is pure chaos, and in Edina, mayhem makes everyone giggle. At their public pool, kids and adults navigate a circuit from



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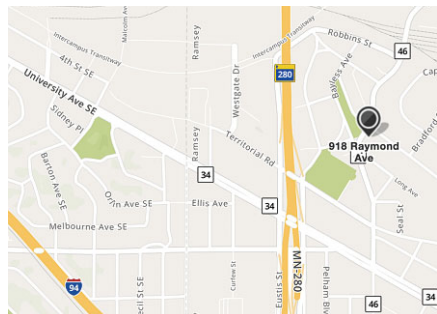
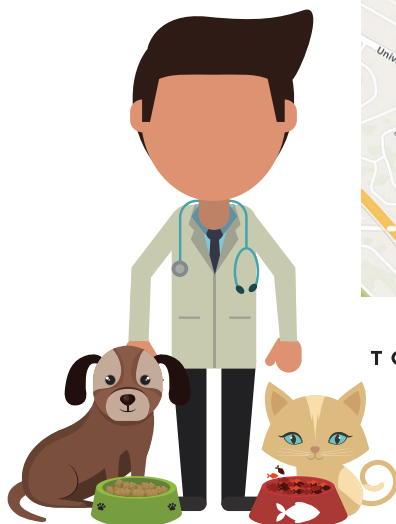
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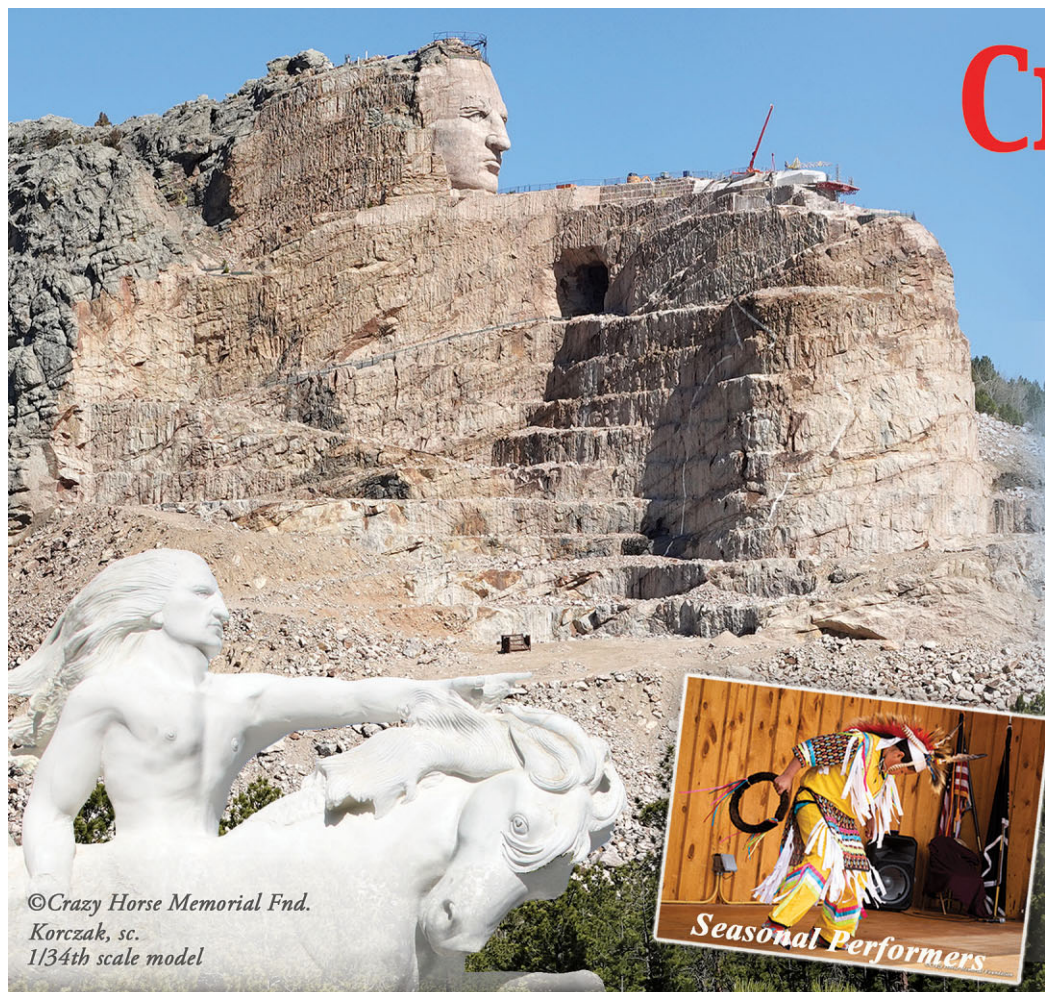


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Seasonal Performers

All Photos: ©Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation

the Shipwreck Express zip line and Pirate Plunge water slides to the high dive and a standing wave built for boogie-boarding. Even the kiddie area is marked with a Jolly Roger and bells that randomly toll not-doom. Open to residents of wherever, the pool offers a “happy hour” where entrance drops by \$2.50 after 5 p.m. With Bomb Pops for just a buck, all that’s missing for a solid summer evening of entertainment is a real, live cannon.

BEST PLACE TO WALK AT NIGHT

Cub Foods

5937 Nicollet Ave. S., Minneapolis

Even before March, nighttime at this 24-hour supermarket already felt like one of the loneliest places in the world. In the COVID era, walking the aisles at 11:30 p.m., behind a mask and surrounded by an acre and a half of almost obscene abundance on the edge of the suburbs, takes on a cinematic strangeness. A late-night zip through the produce section on the way to the frozen foods, keeping a wide berth from whatever scant number of fellow shoppers might be out, is half zombie movie, half Cindy Sherman photograph.

BEST PLACE TO TAKE YOUR MOST BORING FRIEND

Hunt & Gather

4944 Xerxes Ave. S., Minneapolis

612-455-0250

huntandgatherantiques.com

Hunt & Gather is both a curated wonderland teeming with stuff no one “needs” and a hoarder’s paradise disguised by its very good taste. Boring people never see it coming. Take them there and they’re likely to leave with an entirely new sense of possibility—or they’ll never want to hang out again! Either way? Problem solved. It’s an added bonus that most of the shop’s aisles have been so encroached by treasures that standing side-by-side is an impossibility, so “hanging out” with anyone at Hunt & Gather actually entails wandering separate ways, only to rejoin later to compare hauls.

BEST PLACE TO TAKE A TINDER DATE

Science Museum of Minnesota

120 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul

651-221-9444

smm.org

Answering the same questions at coffee shops and bars get old. At the Science

Museum, you can let loose without being too self-conscious. Everyone looks ridiculous doing the hands-on stuff—and that’s okay! It’s also a great place to find out how your date feels about science and children without directly asking them. If you get tired of exploring, sit down in the cafe for a bite to eat or just look out the windows and take in a beautiful view of the Mississippi. If things go well, catch a quick movie in the Omnitheater. If they don’t, you can wander off by yourself and explore, or duck into a corner to text a friend to save you.

BEST NONPROFIT

Mizna

2446 University Ave. W., St. Paul

612-788-6920

mizna.org

Since 1999, Mizna has been at the forefront of elevating Arab-American/SWANA voices in literature, film, and art. That work is only more essential during politically dire times. From spearheading the Arab-American Film Festival shortly after its founding to moderating discussions and book readings with celebrated SWANA authors, Mizna has ensured that Middle Eastern voices—and the multiple identities and intersections that come with them—remain to have a seat at the table.

Readers’ Choice: Secondhand Hounds

BEST ENTREPRENEUR

Alex West Steinman

thecoven.com

With a degree in journalism and work experience in political communications and at the prestigious Fallon ad agency, Alex West Steinman could undoubtedly write this better than we could. Not that she’d have time to: The co-founder of the Coven workspace, which caters to women, non-binary, and trans professionals, is notoriously busy. Coven opened its North Loop space in 2018 and a second branch in St. Paul earlier this year, and already counts more than a 1,000 clients; for every five memberships sold, Coven gives away one for free to someone who can’t afford it. Don’t be surprised if future winners in this category got their start there.

BEST WAY TO SPEND \$5

Flirt Boutique/Sarah’s

177 Snelling Ave. N., St. Paul

651-698-3692

flirt-boutique.com

Usually when Flirt makes this issue, it’s to recognize it as a classy, customer-friendly lingerie store. And it is that. But owner

Don’t Waste Your Trials



Series on 1 Peter

Trials have a way of revealing our hopes. What do we trust in when things get rough? Even without a global pandemic, our world is filled with difficulties, pressures, and hostilities that call for a sure and steadfast hope. We would love to have you join us on our journey through 1 Peter.

Bethlehem Baptist Church is “One Church on Three Campuses” with locations along the I-35 corridor. Worship services are livestreamed on Sundays at 9am, and now various in-person worship service options are available via RSVP during the pandemic. We would love to have you visit us in person or on our livestream! See website for details.



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bethlehem.church



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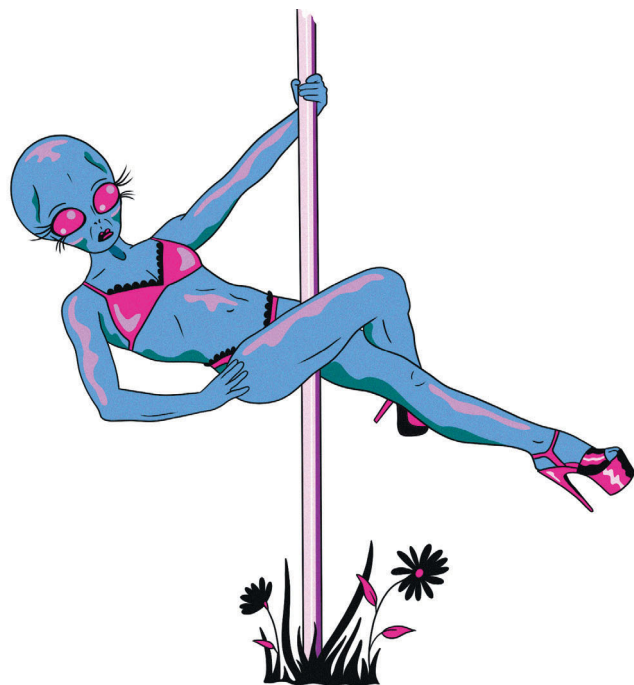
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Jessica Gerard also donates her time and resources to Sarah's... an Oasis for Women, a shelter for survivors of trauma who need a safe haven to get back on their feet. For \$5, you can buy a pair of underwear from Flirt for a woman staying at Sarah's, and the store will match your donation with a second pair. If you've got five bucks to spare, what better way to get rid of it than spending it on someone who doesn't? Flirt also takes gently used bras for clients at Sarah's, where Gerard volunteers monthly to do fittings and hand out donations.

BEST VICTIMLESS CRIME

Jaywalking past a construction zone

Sure, cocaine is great, but have you ever tried stepping into a downtown Minneapolis street without even the slightest concern you might get pulverized by someone's Chevy Silverado? Nothing beats the rush of taking back the streets, and now you can do it bloodlessly with the help of your nearest construction site. Sure, the red hand signal is up, but as long as those big orange barricades are blocking the intersection and the entirety of Hennepin Avenue is a sandbox, you can cross that street whenever you want. Moonwalk across, for all we care. Do a flip. Nobody's coming.

BEST WAY TO SCORE A DATE

Speed dating/singles' meetups at any Con

Cons are about bringing people of various fandoms together, be that through a shared

love of anime, comic books, video games, or movie series. When you think about it, these types of events have a lot of potential for those looking for romance, too. Event organizers seem to get this, and will often host at least one singles' meetup during their festival. At any given Con you might spot a speed-dating session for Trekkies, a meetup for nonbinary cosplayers looking for love, or a late-night room party intended to get shy people interacting. So the next time you're at AniMinneapolis, GalaxyCon, CONvergence, Gaylaxicon, or Crypticon—like, say, in 2021?—be sure to check out the schedule for opportunities to flirt and keep the love going after the weekend.

BEST GAY BAR

Black Hart of Saint Paul

1415 University Ave. W., St. Paul
651-528-8028
blackhartstp.com

There was a hint of suspicion when, in 2018, the Town House bar was bought and rebranded as watering hole for both LGBTQ folks and... soccer fans? Two years in, we're happy to report the new look fits like a stylish drag queen's wig—which, by the way, continues to be a regular attraction at Black Hart, even in COVID times. Starting in April, the bar had queens helping with its weekend takeout service. Customers dug the sight of dolled-up and masked drag performers walking their cheese curds out to the parking lot. An absurd scene—not unlike guys the sight of guys in jerseys yelling about the game parked right next to queer couples—and one St. Paul didn't know it needed, but is happy to have.



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BEST LGBTQ EVENT

Gay Monday at Up-Down

3012 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-823-3487

updownarcadebar.com/Minneapolis

It's hard to think of a more potentially hostile space than a crowded gamer's paradise in the bro-y heart of Lyn-Lake. And that's precisely why this weekly "queer takeover + safe space" is such a swell concept. Started in summer 2018, the rooftop at Gay Monday functions as the closest approximation to a lesbian bar we've got in Minneapolis. Why no one thought to create that kind of space before is beyond us. The vintage arcade games are just a bonus.

BEST STRIP CLUB

King of Diamonds

6600 River Rd., Inver Grove Heights
651-455-3886

king-diamonds.com

In years past, we've recognized this adult playground for serving liquor in the presence of fully nude women. (In Minneapolis, clubs have to choose either/or.) That's still true! But this time we're praising KOD for having a heart underneath all that skin. When coronavirus shut its doors, the club started a GoFundMe for its out-of-work performers, and customers came through with more than \$21,000. It's one thing to drunkenly throw money at the naked women dancing for you; it's another to shell out for them specifically because they can't. In a year like this, that kind of loyalty goes a long way.

BEST DANCE CLUB

The Loring

327 14th Ave. SE, Minneapolis
612-378-4849

loringbarrestaurant.com

The Loring may bill itself as a bar and restaurant, but that's selling it short; it's also a pretty mean nightclub. The floor pulses during the weekend's steamy salsa nights, or you can grab a partner for Rogue Tango on Sundays. (It takes two!) And there's just no more fitting dance night/venue pairing than when Dark Energy comes to the Dinkytown fixture. Ascending the stone staircase, surrounded by all the hottest goths in the Twin Cities as an industrial soundtrack thrums through the multi-tiered space, you're going to feel like you're in the club from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Or in the club scene from *The Matrix*? Point is: The Loring is a very, very cool club. (Even if you're not.)

Readers' Choice: First Avenue

BEST PLACE TO BE DRUNK

On the berm at a Saints game

360 Broadway St., St. Paul
651-644-6659

saintsbaserball.com

The best seat at a St. Paul Saints game is no seat at all. Set your drunk ass down on the gentle hill overlooking the baseball diamond, put your overloaded hotdog or nachos next to you, and let the Saints do the rest. Even if Sober You doesn't like baseball, Drunk You is going to love this, because Drunk You loves tiny helmets, cute

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li'l baby pigs in fun costumes, and a bunch of random people attempting a footrace while dressed as inflatable eyeballs. What's the score? Drunk You doesn't know, and Drunk You doesn't care. Let the nonsense wash over you, people-watch, or simply lie back on the grass and take in the moths swarming the stadium lights overhead.

BEST PLACE TO SHOW UP STONED

A bad movie at Lagoon

1320 Lagoon Ave., Minneapolis
612-823-3020

landmarktheatres.com/minneapolis/lagoon-cinema

Getting high out of your mind and going to see *Cats* (2019) was a ton of fun; it became such a thing that even the Washington Post wrote about it. But while not every cinematic experience affords the wonder of watching Sir Ian McKellan licking milk from a saucer, you can apply this to literally any bad movie. How 'bout *Sonic the Hedgehog*, still vaguely nightmarish even though they fixed his creepy little teeth? Might not be so bad if you're stoned! And there's no better place to do it than the Lagoon, where the popcorn oozes with butter and the old-school cinema feels so cozy you (probably) won't start to freak out.

BEST PLACE TO RUN

Downtown Minneapolis

If this location ever wins again, something has gone horribly wrong. In this case, it's because it already did. In any other year, the idea of running downtown means navigating pedestrians, cars, buses, bikes, the light rail, food truck lines, and construction... all while heaving in lungfuls of exhaust. This year? The streets and sidewalks are empty, almost eerily so, and the air is clean, especially during early or

late hours. Start at one end of downtown and run to another, enjoying the shade cast by the tallest, emptiest, (and among the most beautiful) buildings in the city. Look around. Take it in. And hope it's never that runnable again.

BEST PLACE TO MAKE OUT

Third Precinct ruins

Lake Street and Minnehaha Avenue

This has not been a romantic year. To those lucky enough to be boo'd up pre-COVID, the thought of smushing faces in public probably makes us feel guilty, at best, and outright nervous at worst. If the pandemic didn't cancel your vibe, tragedy and protests cast a pall over the warming months. That's why we have to stand and applaud A'Lexis Hamblin and Celina Berndt, the queer interracial couple who got married and took joyous wedding photos in front of the burnt-down Third Police Precinct in south Minneapolis. We can't think of a better kiss to christen that corner as a place where bold, radical love might, just maybe, take the place of regressive fear.

BEST PLACE TO SEE AND BE SEEN

In line for takeout

Expect the cycle of bars and restaurants opening, closing, and reopening to continue, so long as they're trying to reopen. As far as we can tell, there's no combination of social distancing, cleaning standards, and mask usage that'll make sitting inside and breathing with other people a good idea for the time being. That said, if you don't support your favorite restaurants now, they might not be there to return to once this passes. Order to-go, be polite and patient, and tip generously; no, they're not refilling your water glass... they're just risking their safety to keep you well-fed in a pandemic.



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Food & Drink

Editor's note: Though many establishments are in limbo, a tipped glass 🍷 means the place had existed well into 2020, only to entirely perish by mid-July.

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Demi

212 N. Second St. #100, Minneapolis
612-404-1123

demimpls.com

Eating dinner at Demi feels like sharing in a closely guarded secret. There's its demure size—just 20 seats—and tucked-away location off of North Second Street. And there's the exclusive nature—tickets, which will cost about \$250 per person at a minimum, go on sale just once a month and are always snapped up before the day is out. But if you're willing and able to splurge (and set a reminder on your phone), the immersive experience will leave you breathless. The meal will be unforgettable; the service will be impeccable. Everything will be curated, down to the cutlery holders (made by chef Gavin Kaysen's woodworker brother). You'll never eat a dinner roll this good again in your life. We'd say more, but we're running out of space, and... well, we wouldn't want to spoil the secret.

Readers' Choice: Colita

BEST RESTAURANT IN MINNEAPOLIS

Grand Cafe (yes, again)

3804 Grand Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-822-8260

grandcafemn.com

Amazing how being great—and French—doesn't mean being intimidating. And no one puts in more work only to have it come out looking—and tasting—like play, quite like Grand Cafe. Expanded menu additions like "Snack Attack" (a comically fast-paced prix fixe, disguised as a happy hour, complete with a cartoon shark-eating-a-burger mascot) do worlds for making elevated dining puckish and approachable. The same can be said for installing puppets in the front window, bothering to serve perfectly whimsical weekend brunches, and beckoning us to their little pink palace



Illustration by
Noah Lawrence-Holder
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from their cult-favorite Instagram account. At Grand Cafe, every visit ends up feeling like a Very Merry Unbirthday.

Readers' Choice: Spoon and Stable

BEST CHEF

Yia Vang

Chef Yia Vang's Union Hmong Kitchen has delivered his uncompromising yet approachable Hmong food anywhere that'll have him. Whether slinging soups at Lowry Hill Meats, serving an entire pig competing in 2019's Cochon 555, hosting TPT's cross-cultural cooking series *Relish*, designing a cocktail with Norseman, catering, or building community, he's making a name for himself, and he doesn't even have a restaurant... that is, until his very own Vinai opens *fingers crossed* soon. Until then, catch Vang's offerings at Union Hmong Kitchen's residency in their food truck at Sociable Ciderworks, and likely a pop-up near you, because Vang can't stop doing that. And we hope he never does.

BEST RESTAURANT IN ST. PAUL

Magic Noodle

1337 University Ave. W., St. Paul
651-369-6688

magicnoodleusa.com

Diners have been spellbound by Magic Noodle's artistry from day one, with word of their artisans' skill traveling well beyond Midway. Here, the allure includes being drawn into your meal's performance, which culminates in bowls of broth that are balanced in depth and spice, coiled with noodles hand-pulled before one's very eyes. Bop between shareable, traditional Chinese appetizers, a bowl of Chongqing noodles that are toothy perfection bathed in chili oil, or maybe a dish of the restaurant's tender Shanxi shaved noodles, all offered affordably and in an environment that belies the precision entailed in each meal. Make no mistake: That feeling you're experiencing is awe.

Readers' Choice: The Lexington

BEST RESTAURANT IN THE 'BURBS

Vann

4016 Shoreline Dr., Spring Park
952-381-9042

vannrestaurant.com

A seafood restaurant on the shore of Lake Minnetonka seems like a pitch right down the middle. But Vann is unlike anything else in the neighborhood (or the Twin Cities, for that matter). Chef Erik Skaar creates

innovative dishes from locally foraged ingredients and exotic seafood, inspired by coastal cuisines that span the globe. The trick is that everything plays so well together—from the tightly curated daily menu, to the dining room's refined decor, to the elegant composition of each plate. Oh, and there's a uniquely suburban perk: free parking, steps from the front door.

Readers' Choice: Travail Kitchen and Amusements

BEST RESTAURANT WORTH THE DRIVE

Lakeview Drive Inn

610 E. Sarnia St., Winona
507-454-3723

lakeviewdriveinn.com

From March through September, southwestern Minnesota's Lakeview Drive Inn is a sweet summer curiosity, full of nostalgia and history. Cruise through this unique drive-in restaurant, where local high schoolers provide curb service and vintage car enthusiasts congregate to show off their collections at one of the state's oldest operating burger joints. Lakeview began as a root beer stand in 1938 before its owners added walls, turning it into a fully formed restaurant by 1953. True to its roots, the place still serves homemade root beer brewed from a secret recipe, perfected over the course of 80 years. A giant root beer barrel has even been enshrined via chainsaw in a 100-year-old elm tree stump.



BEST FINE DINING

Bardo

222 E. Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis
612-886-8404

bardompls.com

Dining at Bardo is a delectable lesson in art appreciation—the precisely plated food has a vibrancy that rivals the works hanging on the walls at Mia. The menu is ever-changing, relying heavily on locally sourced ingredients, but one thing is certain: Those ingredients will be layered into symphonic creations that soar above the sum of their parts. Add in an elegant dining room, gracious service, and a thoughtful wine list, and the result is a masterpiece.

BEST ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Giulia

215 S. Fourth St., Minneapolis
612-215-5450

dinegiulia.com

Italian cuisine is renowned for its emphasis on fresh ingredients, and Giulia takes that imperative to the next level. For instance, an appetizer of mozzarella is made tableside, where the cheese is artfully stretched and formed into a plump mound before it's garnished with a drizzle of balsamic. The first bite is nothing short of a revelation. The restaurant's Northern Italian-inspired menu is rounded out with housemade pastas, meaty entrees, and oven-fired pizzas (the clam 'za is a must). Finish on a

sweet note with the black cocoa budino, and say a prayer of thanks that Italian food this good can be found so close to home.

Readers' Choice: Bar La Grassa

BEST LATIN AMERICAN RESTAURANT

Mañana Restaurant y Pupuseria

798 E. Seventh St., St. Paul
651-793-8482

Mañana in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood is the perfect place for any craving, mood, or need. The restaurant serves up exceptional renditions of Salvadorian and Mexican staples like tamales and yuca frita in their recently expanded space, which includes a full bar, a patio, and two dining rooms. Dine on homestyle cooking, tap Mexican beers, and enjoy an inviting atmosphere, all at affordable prices. Don't miss out on ordering some of their beloved hot, fresh-off-the-griddle pupusas served with curtido, salsa, rice, and beans. Add jamaica or some horchata to ensure you're getting the most joyous experience.

Readers' Choice: El Burrito Mercado

BEST INDIAN RESTAURANT

Namaste India Grill & Brew House

3673 Lexington Ave. N., Arden Hills
651-330-6522

namasteindiamn.net

The team at Namaste India Grill & Brew House is not interested in cutting corners or muting flavors. From homemade chutneys and flatbreads to fresh ingredients and house spice blends, this Arden Hills gem serves some of the most thoughtful flavors around. Their expansive menu offers classic takeout items like tikka masala and chicken makhani. Staples aside, look for regional and street foods that are harder to come by in Minnesota's restaurant scene, like chaat, chola bhatura, and vada pav. With excellent customer service, great drinks, and house-made desserts, it's easy to see why they're becoming a Twin Cities favorite.

BEST MEDITERRANEAN

Olive & Lamb

2424 University Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-353-5196

oliveandlamb.com

In less than a year, Olive & Lamb has ushered in a much needed taste of Iran in northeast Minneapolis. Whether you're taking the traditional route by ordering one of the restaurant's many kebab or shawarma entrees, or going new school



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Food & Drink

and getting items Chipotle-style in a bowl, the offerings are rich and satisfying, honoring tradition with a modern twist. Standout appetizers like lemon saffron wings and housemade Persian ice cream with pistachios, saffron, and a hint of rose water illustrate just how welcome of an addition Olive & Lamb is to the culinary tapestry of the Central Avenue corridor.

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN

Afandina Cafe

4001 University Ave. NE,
Columbia Heights
763-710-7431

One of the most hard to come by elements in local Middle Eastern restaurants is consistency, but Afandina Cafe—a Palestinian-owned and -operated spot in northeast Minneapolis—serves this sorely missed quality by the boatload. From freshly cut shawarma sandwiches right off the spit, to decadent, Cities-best knafeh, Afandina is setting a new standard for serving a wide variety of Middle Eastern fare while sticking to top-notch, high-quality ingredients in every single appetizer, entree, and platter they offer.

BEST EAST AFRICAN RESTAURANT

Dilla Ethiopian Restaurant

1813 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis
612-332-2898

[facebook.com/DillaEthiopianRestaurantMinnesota](https://www.facebook.com/DillaEthiopianRestaurantMinnesota)

While the Red Sea in Minneapolis's Cedar-Riverside neighborhood has served as an anchor for years, Beko Tufa created Dilla just around the corner based on her cooking experience at the former. Since opening in 2007, Dilla has provided a treasure trove of Ethiopian cuisine at its finest. While Tufa's son, Wagari Hiripa Hunde, serves as manager, Tufa still does a majority of the cooking. Bring a deep squad to tackle her Yetebaberu or Yichalale, or indulge in savory versions of Doro Watt or Yebeg Alichu Wot when hangry. It's just hard to go wrong at Dilla.

BEST VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT

iPho by Saigon

704 University Ave. W., St. Paul
651-225-8751

iphomn.com

One of the best things about dining at iPho is silently rooting for the folks seated

nearby who order the 10-pound jumbo pho. It's a beautiful sight to behold: all that gorgeous, flavorful broth gently sloshing as a server carefully, casually places it on the table despite the always humming atmosphere. No matter the size of the bowl or dish, at iPho it's going to be deeply satisfying. Their pho is consistently generous and steaming, the bun a perfect riot of flavors and textures, and banh mi arrive on baguettes that shatter on first bite, yielding savory pâté and cool, crisp cucumber and jalapeños.

Readers' Choice: Quang Restaurant

BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT

Grand Szechuan Restaurant

10602 France Ave. S., Bloomington
952-888-6507

grandszechuanmn.com

Nestled in a west Bloomington strip mall, between a vitamin store and a Dollar Tree, is Grand Szechuan. The verdant family restaurant has a sprawling floor plan, ample seating, and a pleasing decor that will tickle Minnesotans of Scandinavian stock. The menu is 13 pages deep, with authentic Chinese dishes in front (think: ma la beef tendon, bamboo shoots in blood-red chili sauce, lotus roots, spicy rabbit with all the little bones) and Chinese-American in the back (General Tso, etc.). To get the most from visiting Grand Szechuan, bring a large group of voracious friends, enough to populate their banquet-style round tables with lazy Susans, hellbent on ordering with abandon.

Readers' Choice: Rainbow Chinese

BEST KOREAN RESTAURANT

Kimchi Tofu House

307 Oak St. SE, Minneapolis
612-331-1112

kimchitofu.com

"Soondubu jjigae" translates to "silky tofu stew," the specialty of Kimchi Tofu House. The dish's Korean name is important because these two core elements are independently glorious, but together form an experience. The tofu is a velvety-silky texture that can only be freshly made, completely unpressed. The broth at the heart of the stew is umami-forward, with a flavor directly akin to kimchi. Choose add-ins and a spice level not tuned to Midwestern palates, crack a raw egg into the still-boiling stew, and eat with rice for one of the warmest, most filling, comforting things you can do for yourself.

Readers' Choice: Hoban Korean BBQ

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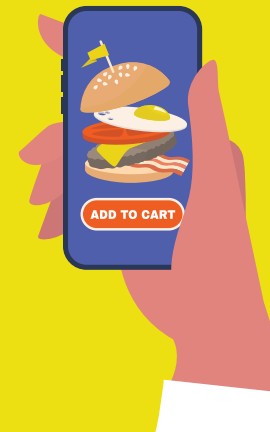


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BEST THAI RESTAURANT

Thai Cafe

371 University Ave. W., St. Paul
651-225-8231
thaicafemn.com

On winter nights, Thai Café's cozy dining area, perched just off the Green Line's Western Avenue stop, beckons with warmth, providing respite from the biting cold. The slurpable, spoonable curries and spring rolls filled with crisp vegetables lower your shoulders from around your ears. Choose any of their curries (you can't go wrong), the pad Thai (especially with tofu and pork), or the "healthy soup," which, sure, its name might conjure a bowl of clear broth, but trust us here. It teems with bright green broccoli, tender tofu, delicately shredded chicken... and, yes, all that comes in pretty much the best broth ever.

BEST VEGAN

Fig & Farro

3001 Hennepin Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-208-0609
figandfarro.com

Vegan food can be approached from a mindset of restriction, a mere subtraction of animal-based ingredients that leaves diners feeling deprived... or it can be like the globally inspired menu at Fig & Farro. Theirs is a celebration of plant-based abundance, whether by way of a vegetable-topped pizza, a platter of hummus and falafel, or a weekend brunch buffet. The restaurant's appeal is best summed up by their giant shareable blueberry cinnamon roll, spread thick with coconut frosting. Sure, it will delight a table full of vegans. But it will satisfy an omnivore or three, too.

Readers' Choice: J. Selby's

BEST VEGETARIAN

Himalayan Restaurant

2910 E. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-332-0880
himalayanmomo.com

The stereotype that meat-free meals are bland and joyless just doesn't add up when analyzing the cuisine of the region with more vegetarians than anywhere on earth. At Himalayan Restaurant, vegetables and meat-free proteins are given care, consideration, and flavor. Fresh naan is baked in the in-house tandoor oven to carry decadent concoctions starring spinach and potatoes and okra straight to your mouth. Come for the lunch or brunch buffet to survey a variety of tarkari (vegetable) dishes. Or swing by and order favorites like palak paneer and bhata aaloo.

BEST RESTAURANT FOR A FIRST DATE

Sandcastle

4955 W. Lake Nokomis Pkwy.,
Minneapolis
612-722-5550
sandcastlempls.com

We have two hard-and-fast rules about first-date locations: cute spot, easy getaway. Nestled on the shore of Lake Nokomis, Sandcastle satisfies both. You can get mains like shrimp tacos or brown rice bowls from the walk-up window of this colorful lakeside shack, but there's also a two-person picnic bag option with your choice of sandwich, side, fruit, and dessert. (See? Cute!) And its location right off the bike path ensures you can walk or ride off into the proverbial sunset just as quickly as you arrived if your Tinder date sucks IRL. Sure, it's only open seasonally... but who has the mental energy to go on first dates in the winter anyway?

BEST RESTAURANT FOR ROMANCE

Gardens of Salonica

19 Fifth St. NE, Minneapolis
612-378-0611
gardensofsalonica.com

There are big-R-romantic restaurants—with prix fixe menus, white tablecloths, and a final tab that ensures they're a once-a-year splurge... and then there's Gardens of Salonica, where low-key, heartfelt romance comes off as more attainable, regularly. With its creamy stucco walls and stone fountain, the dining room feels like a whirlwind getaway to Greece, and the gentle murmur of classical music sets a charming mood without drowning out intimate conversations. Then there's the cuisine—if flaming cheese doesn't set a passionate tone for the evening, what will?

Readers' Choice: W.A. Frost and Company

BEST VIEW

Aster Cafe

125 SE Main St., Minneapolis
612-379-3138
astercafe.com

Despite more than 30 miles of Mississippi riverfront shared between Minneapolis and St. Paul, precious few places afford a chance to sit and watch that great waterway with a legal drink. Aster Cafe comes through with creative food and cocktails alongside the best view in town. The Mississippi River, wide and muddy, lumbers

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toward St. Anthony Falls, and downtown shimmers on the other side; the Central Avenue Bridge looms to your right, and in the foreground stands historic Main Street, with its bricks and carriage rides (and Segway tours). Aster's leafy patio adds a nice Old World vibe to the setting, but the essential charm is all Minneapolis, baby.

BEST SERVICE

La Tapatia

1237 Larpentour Ave. W., Roseville
651-253-6175
lafamiliatapatia.com

Word of mouth has led flocks of cityfolk to this popular food truck-turned-restaurant run by a family known for serving high-quality Mexican eats and treating guests like one of their own, whether we're dining in or simply swinging through. Beyond La Tapatia's fresh tortillas and incredible salsas, the restaurant shines because staff go above and beyond to accommodate customers' tastes, welcoming customization and questions. Takeout boxes are always labeled, with liquids and garnishes nicely separated. And when they bring out those fresh Mexican brownies and agua frescas, you may find yourself asking how to best become part of La Tapatia's "forever family."

Readers' Choice: Spoon and Stable

BEST PLACE TO EAT OUT WITH YOUR KIDS

Gandhi Mahal

3009 27th Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-729-5222
gandhimahal.com

Sure, crayons and paper placemats are nice, but for restless kindergarteners at a restaurant, they can get old quickly. Gandhi Mahal meets the challenge with a full-on play area stocked with all manner of toys: a place where kids can be kids. It's tucked in the back corner, while the remainder of the restaurant maintains a calm vibe suitable for adult conversation. When the food arrives, even the pickiest eaters will fall for the naan, tandoori wings, and mango lassis, while everyone else savors their intricately spiced entrees. Add a thoughtfully curated wine and beer list, and you've got the rarest of restaurants: date-night-worthy, but also family-friendly.

BEST RESTAURANT TO TAKE OUT-OF-TOWNERS

Sea Salt Eatery

4801 Minnehaha Ave. S., Minneapolis

612-721-8990

seasaltmpls.com

Locals know it's not officially spring until Sea Salt opens for the season. As the heady scent of fried seafood wafts across Minnehaha Park and taps blossom with all manner of local beers, the line of customers grows until the wait for food is an hour-plus. But while the park bustles with families and musicians play on the steps, it's time well spent. Everyone's in good spirits, and at the head of the line, treasure awaits: delectable fish tacos and a sprawling deck shaded by towering trees, with Minnehaha Falls roaring mere steps away. Out-of-towners often ask why we put up with such brutal winters—bring them here and let them see for themselves.

BEST PRIX FIXE MENU

Restaurant Alma

528 University Ave. SE, Minneapolis
612-379-4909
almampls.com/restaurant

Prix fixe menus are supposed to remove the burden of choice. Restaurant Alma's decadent three-course offering does indeed make for an intrepid evening, but the 12 options (four per course) render decision-making difficult. How to choose between hamachi crudo and duck liver bruschetta? Or lamb ragu and octopus tempura? The simple answer is don't—go with three other people, everyone pony up the \$62 price tag, and share the entire menu. Choice: eliminated! Wine pairings are a \$36 add on, but don't worry, your server will make those selections for you.

BEST GLUTEN-FREE MENU

Colita

5400 Penn Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-886-1606
colitampls.com

When the primary vessel for so many dishes is corn tortillas (made fresh to order!), it takes little effort to keep gluten off the menu. But for the sake of inclusion, Colita makes the most of Oaxacan flavor profiles without using a single fleck of flour in the joint. Their lauded bar program, centered around pre-Columbian ferments and agave spirits, is also free of gluten, and though they do serve beer, it's kept separate, free from cross-contamination. The kitchen nimbly balances chiles, herbs, citrus, and umami-boosters into one of the best elevated Mexican dining experiences in town—regardless of gluten tolerance.

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BEST DINING TREND

Tiny Restaurants

Boludo. Zettas. Asa's. Al's Breakfast. Kimchi Tofu House. Victor's. Most of these spots are already on our list, but what else do they have in common? You couldn't fit a soccer team inside them. Small-footprint restaurants mean lower rent, creative use of space, and greatest of all: specialization. They all do a short list of things exceptionally well instead of trying to please everyone with a kitchen-sink menu. As food, labor, and rent keep rising, prepare to welcome more of these little guys in unexpected locations, and possibly wait a little bit (sometimes).

BEST DINER

Band Box Diner

729 S. 10th St., Minneapolis

612-332-0850

facebook.com/bandboxeats

What makes a diner great? Cheap, tasty food? A sense of community? An aura of mid-century nostalgia? A short-order cook working the grill with balletic grace while also carrying on a conversation? No need to pick just one or two—get them all at the Band Box, an actual historic landmark where you'll often find owner Brad Ptacek at the flat-top, flipping burgers, cracking eggs, and holding court with the crew of regulars and anyone else who wanders through. There's a sincere all-are-welcome spirit here, so come on in. You're home, and your cheeseburger—no-frills yet utterly perfect—awaits.

Readers' Choice: Mickey's Diner

BEST LATE-NIGHT EATS

Flameburger

4800 Central Ave. NE, Columbia

Heights

763-571-3267

theflameburger.com

Columbia Heights' greasy spoon has a cult following among certain restaurant-industry folk who love a pilgrimage, and for good reason. Once those workers' aprons are safely tucked away for the night, only Flameburger dishes up burgers, fries, pancakes, and hashbrowns with enough buttery love to rival and revive a weary chef's heart (which ain't no small task). With 24-hour service, patrons can feel as if they've warped into a Rockwell or Hopper painting, depending on the temperature of the room, hour, and (absence of) daylight outside. Until Minnesota finally gets its Waffle House, Flameburger will keep its griddle going, patching up all comers.

BEST DESSERT

Horchata Pot de Creme at Hola Arepa

3501 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis

612-345-5583

holaarepa.com

Hola Arepa's Horchata Pot de Creme is a delight of textures and an admirable balance of flavors. A quick excavation reveals three layers: The bottom is a smooth, super rich, and deeply satisfying chocolate custard. The middle consists of toasty Rice Krispy-type things that are cinnamon-sweet and crunchy. Above it all floats a blackberry compote packing a necessary tartness for balance, which prevents the bottom layer's richness from becoming cloying. As an added bonus, this treat is blessedly petite, so you can order it after your main meal without fear of exploding.

BEST PATIO/OUTDOOR SEATING

Muddy Waters Bar & Eatery

2933 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis

612-872-2232

muddywatersmpls.com

Everyone loves a rooftop view or a sunny sidewalk, but some of the most magical outdoor seating arrangements have the power to transport you from a busy city street to a quiet, secretive nook. The situation at Minneapolis's Muddy Waters is the latter. It's a fairly narrow alleyway—even more so when patrons crowd into the little café tables lining either wall—but it's got romantic tea lights, greenery, and an unobstructed view of the sky. It's a quiet place best enjoyed with a cocktail (may we recommend a paloma?), a book, and the exciting sensation that you could be anywhere and nowhere at all.

BEST PUB

The Prodigal Public House

25 E. 26th St., Minneapolis

612-354-3689

prodigalpub.com

How to build a great pub in five, easy steps: 1) Don't have quite enough chairs in the room everyone wants to be in, so strangers loiter until there are no more strangers. 2) Serve only a few tap beers (because choices are overrated), and have a permanent "special" named for the owner's dog (which is named for a whiskey). 3) Offer the city's best chicken pot pies, made by the owner's daughter. 4) Make it look and feel like it's been there for ages, when it hasn't. 5) There is no step five, because making a great pub like the Prodigal can be just that simple, folks.



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Food & Drink

BEST BAR FOOD

Iron Door Pub

3001 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-200-9967
theirondoorpub.com

Iron Door's menu is perplexingly demanding for a neighborhood beer-and-a-bump-style watering hole. You would (and should) think twice about ordering duck in a place like this, but the roasted duck French dip is assuredly delectable, masterfully roasted to tender, chopped, and topped with gruyere and a side of duck jus to keep everything on the damper side of moist. Look for tacos like mom used to make—if mom used double corn tortillas. The pub's pork tots and Indian-leaning cauliflower fritters are utterly unexpected, too. Iron Door's kitchen crew puts in the work without needing to, and it shows.

BEST-KEPT SECRET

Savory Bake House

3008 36th Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-729-1310
savorybakehouse.com

Savory Bake House is a tiny spot, easy to drive past but impossible to forget once tried. The cinnamon rolls and muffins are knockouts, but true to the bakery's name, the savory goods shine brightest. The offerings are always changing and consistently intriguing: a breakfast pie with potatoes and Cotswald, a braided bread with sweet corn, roasted tomatoes, spinach, and fresh mozzarella. There are layers of flavor unlike anything else in town, somehow light and hearty all at once, and very much worth seeking out, again and again. (Look for the butterscotch-yellow storefront just off East Lake Street.)

BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR IN MINNEAPOLIS

Lakes and Legends Brewing Company

1368 Lasalle Ave., Minneapolis
612-999-6020
lakesandlegends.com

Lakes and Legends is the sprawling beer hall that occupies the entire ground floor of the LPM Apartments tower in Loring Park, and the anchor bar of the neighborhood. Hops hail from right here in Minnesota, brews are poured by bartenders who remember your name, and the closing-time playlists are adorable. During the dead of winter, it's an indoor yard party, and summer becomes a block party—and your dog's favorite place to get pets, eat treats, and hang out with

all its dog friends. Some weekends the bar transforms into a craft market; others it hosts paint-by-numbers pet portraits. Food comes by way of Eggy's, Lotus, or the food truck parked right outside.

Readers' Choice: Grumpy's Bar

BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR IN ST. PAUL

The Spot Bar

859 Randolph Ave., St. Paul
651-224-7433

Established in 1885 at Randolph and Victoria, The Spot Bar has been a watering hole where parched gullets have been quenched for over 130 years. It's the best of all St. Paul's drinking establishments, folded into one log cabin-esque, carpeted hideaway. Here, regulars yuk it up with a bar staff that balances friendliness and nonchalance toward randos. TouchTunes gives way to monthly cribbage tournaments and an annual pig roast, while a stained-glass rendition of the bar itself hangs on the wall, backlit by an artificial sun that—and sure, maybe it's partly the super affordable Hamm's talking—radiates a hint of warmth unto all who gaze upon it.

Readers' Choice:
Casper's & Runyon's Nook

BEST NEW BAR

Meteor

2027 N. Second St., Minneapolis
612-886-2483
meteormpls.com

Say you want a good cocktail. Not something crafty that takes 15 minutes to assemble, comes garnished with an herb garden, and costs the same as five Grain Belts. We're talking something solid, tasty, boozy but balanced, where you can come as you are, nothing's fussy, and everyone's having fun. Well, Robb Jones and Elliot Manthey made Meteor just for you. Tucked between Northeast and the North Side, they sell modestly priced cocktails, and bake Mucci's frozen pizzas in one of their behind-the-bar ovens. Crafty drinks in a not-so-crafty setting? Race you there.

BEST DIVE BAR

Northeast Yacht Club

801 Marshall St. NE, Minneapolis
612-378-1740

Lil yachty teams with subtle hallmarks that have kept generations of drinkers sneaking in its back door for "one." We'd argue none of these charms have gotten



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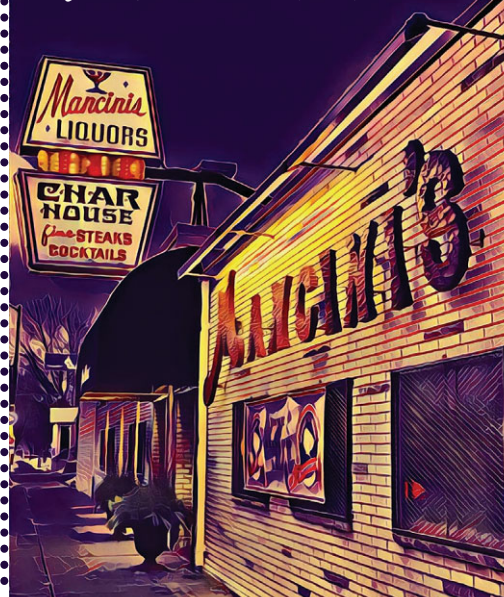
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Food & Drink

less print space in the bar's 120-year history than its lemonade, though. Sure, the hand-pressed mixer awaiting its stiffer counterpart may prove merely a footnote in the bar's storied run—teeming, as it is, with actual bootlegging tunnels, the perfect pool table, subway tile floors, and reliably amicable compatriots—but after one sip you'll understand why we're spilling the beans on an ancient dive's not-so-secret weapon. Heck, even if you disagree, neither it nor you are going anywhere fast.

Readers' Choice: Grumpy's Bar

BEST BAR TREND

Non-alcoholic Cocktails

Teetotalling bar patrons were once forced to settle for pint-sized glasses of fountain soda, or worse—saccharine mocktails, thrown together from a hodgepodge of fruit juices. No more: Today's non-drinkers can enjoy savory beverages crafted with just as much care as traditional cocktails. Whether they're listed as “non-alcoholic,” “zero-proof,” or “spirit-free,” these concoctions feature complex flavors that hold their own with their boozy compatriots, thanks to ingredients like fresh herbs, bitters, and vinegars. They're even served in the same fancy glassware, with a garnish or two. This kind of innovation deserves a (non-alcoholic) toast.

BEST WINE BAR

Bar Brava

1914 Washington Ave. N., Minneapolis
612-208-1270

barbravamn.com

Natural wine objectively rules. Juicy, fruity, funky, colorful, and very in right now—what's not to like? Well, there's the one thing: It's still pretty hard to come by outside of major coastal cities. Enter Bar Brava, Minneapolis's first natural wine bar, a laid-back place where you can sip juicy orange ferments to your heart's content while snacking on Kofta Meatballs, natty wine-rubbed ribs, or just a cute little platter of olives. The bottle list is long as hell; by-the-glass options are varied and fun. The food's reasonably priced and beautifully prepared. And there's beer and cider if you're not a Wine Guy. Which brings us back to that initial question... what's not to like?

BEST BARTENDER

Our guardian angel, Eagles Club #34

2507 E. 25th St., Minneapolis
612-729-4469

minneapolis eagles34.org

Oh, the Eagles Club: cheap prices, A+ chicken fingers, top-tier karaoke. And making sure you have the best time, every time, is the world's sweetest, fastest bartender. She's balletic behind the stick, as tough and as elegant as Tonya Harding. And to be clear, that's a compliment! To our knowledge she never beat up a rival, though we bet she'd leap to our defense if push came to shove. But when she's pouring a pint or cooking a Jakeeno's bar pie or asking whether you want whipped cream on the Jello shot she just pulled from the fridge, she's always doing it with a wink and a smile. (We only wish we got back before COVID hit to get her name.)

BEST DISTILLERY

Dampfwerk Distilling

6311 Cambridge St., St. Louis Park
612-460-8190

thedampfwerk.com

The spirits at Dampfwerk are a lot like the distillery—a bit unfamiliar on the palate, but worth rolling around the mouth to savor every note. Dampfwerk's focus on traditional German spirits—bitter herbal liqueurs and complex fruit brandies—makes the cocktail room's menu an adventure worth seeking. Classic cocktails are reimaged with unexpected spirits, and the “50/50” half-sized cocktails offer a low-stakes way to sample unfamiliar flavors. And after a drink or two, that distillery name will trip right off the tongue.

Readers' Choice: Tattersall Distilling

BEST COCKTAILS

Travail Kitchen and Amusements

4134 N. Hubbard Ave., Robbinsdale
763-535-1131

travailkitchen.com

When the Travail Collective's party starters added bar director Nathaniel Smith to their merry band during their Minneapolis residency, their cocktail program undertook a (not so) serious refocusing. First, Smith took on '90s drinking culture for Travail's “homage” to the era with piquant takes on the Cosmopolitan and the French martini, creating an inventive cocktail counterpoint to Pig Ate My Pizza's brewery. Three themed residencies later, Smith's first untethered menu has launched at the newly completed Travail 3.0, where his ability to complement unexpected flavors in whimsical drinking vessels dovetails perfectly with the carnival Travail has been cultivating for a decade.

Readers' Choice: Tattersall Distilling

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BEST MOCKTAILS

Marvel Bar

50 Second Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-206-3929
marvelbar.com

Say, that's a nice nationally recognized cocktail bar you've got there. Sure would be a shame if someone... got rid of all the alcohol. And yet, that's exactly what Marvel Bar did this January with "Dry," a new concept that introduced a slew of truly inventive alcohol-less drinks and minimized the visibility of booze in the space. It was a bold experiment that asked just what a bar is, without making folks feel bad about their choices, whatever those may be—you could still get a stiff drink if you wanted one! "We want to make sure that anybody walking through here is as comfortable as possible," GM Peder Schweigert told City Pages. We'll raise an NA drink to that.

BEST MARGARITA

Centro at Popol Vuh

1414 Quincy St. NE, Minneapolis
612-345-5527
popolvuhmpls.com/centro

Centro serves so many of their Quincy Margaritas (\$8) that they had to start batching and kegging them. Instead of requiring a bartender to hand-mix each one, they're poured right out of the tap, over ice, and served with a rim laced with tortilla chip salt, buoying guests from thirsty to festive

in the time it would ordinarily take to get a Michelob Golden Light. The high-volume approach also means that every single pour is consistent—no imbalanced sour bombs, no burning tequila overloads. If only everything in life could be so reliable (and reasonably priced).

Readers' Choice: Barrio

BEST MARTINI

Meritage

410 Saint Peter St., St. Paul
651-222-5670
meritage-stp.com

Sipping on a proper martini, seated in the swank confines of Rice Park's delightful French bistro, Meritage, it's impossible not to feel like high society—and even more so after a second round. Their bartenders mix the drink to perfection; Meritage's dirty martinis are served with delectable olives and a hint of salty brine that complements the crisp bite of liquor, without overwhelming. Plus, they know martinis just feel a little fancier when served in coupe glasses. When you need a refreshing pick-me-up, or want to feel like le beau monde for a night, Meritage's martinis are the ticket.

BEST BLOODY MARY

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No matter the time of day or severity of hangover, the oft-underrated Bloody Mary serves up an important triumvirate of veggie power, booze, and snacks. At Icehouse, find five artful renditions of the drink. Their pork-fueled version swaps the traditional celery stick and olives for a mini doughnut and a sturdy slice of bacon. If meat isn't your thing, opt for the Bloody Lisa, a pint topped with a hearty skewer of pickled veggies. The menu also features a Bloody spiked with gin, an Aquavit Bloody with a raw oyster in its shell, and yet another made with Laphroaig that arrives topped with a confit duck wing. Icehouse has a meal in a glass for everyone!

Readers' Choice: Hell's Kitchen

BEST BEER

Lift Bridge Silhouette

1900 Tower Dr. W., Stillwater
888-430-2337
liftbridgebrewery.com

Silhouette is a fitting name for a beer that's long lived in another's shadow. We won't mention the other local imperial stout that gets all the attention, because it's high time the signature beer of Stillwater gets its moment in the sun. Silhouette has been remarkably consistent since debuting in 2013. In that time, Lift Bridge opened a taproom, refurbished that taproom, ventured into soda and then seltzer, and through dynastic shifts, Silhouette's excellence has not wavered (nor has its 99 rating on Beer Advocate). Calendars can be set by its release date, and if you've been smart enough to cellar older releases, you have a time capsule of what greatness in local brewing tastes like.

Readers' Choice: Surly Furious

BEST BEER (LIMITED RELEASE)

Crankin' Foamers from Fair State Brewing Cooperative

2506A Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-444-3209
fairstate.coop

The last time Fair State and Modern Times Beer joined forces, they won Best Beer (Limited Release) with Spirit Foul, but their second team up is almost a middle finger to that brew. An "American Slammin' Lager" made with "real corn, the old-fashioned way," Crankin' Foamers is so far from the ubiquitous New England IPA that the haze boys curdled at its mere complexion. You could drink 50 of these clean-finisher fizzy yellow beer pops and never notice the post-post-post-irony at work: Two of the best breweries in America just made a localized Budweiser clone, and it's better than your

Untappd account will let you accept.

BEST BREWERY

Barrel Theory Beer Company

248 E. Seventh St., St. Paul
651-600-3422
barreltheory.com

Barrel Theory's Lowertown taproom used to be a magic shop and, well, it still is. RUSA Today, Thrillist, and Beer Advocate have all counted the St. Paul brewery among the best in the country, but only Twin Citizens have a full read on why they deserve it. Head brewer Timmy Johnson is a savant whose unrestricted creativity means crowlers and bottles sell out before the national news can turn their heads. What the Fluff, 100% That Witch, all the Rain Drops variants—Barrel Theory keeps these doves up their sleeves, releasing them for the rapt faithful. Magic is real, and it's brewed in St. Paul.

Readers' Choice: Surly Brewing Co.

BEST NEW BREWERY

Falling Knife Brewing Co.

783 Harding St. NE #100, Minneapolis
612-354-7101
fallingknife.beer

Before it even debuted, Falling Knife was already mired in two legacies: one of success, one of failure. The brewery opened in the spot where NorthGate had recently closed, and to combat the bad vibes, they hired brewer Robbie Denaway, who'd flourished at Surly and Fair State. It's the latter that's triumphed, and Falling Knife has totally transformed the Northeast location into a bistro-style taproom and gameroom where they gleefully toy with tradition. Beers like their Freischütz German pilsner show that they've mastered the basics, while making their nothin's sacred Neon Midnight series feels like a rightful transgression. First year down, their legacy is now their own to make.

BEST BEER TREND

Brewery Collaborations

Minnesota breweries have parroted the "a rising tide floats all boats" axiom for years, but lately they've put those words into delicious action. All over the state, breweries have been sharing recipes and resources, releasing double-branded cans that say, "we told you we actually like each other." Lupulin and Barrel Theory did what they do best and made an opulent hazy IPA. Modist and Junkyard joined hands for a quirky pair of milk stouts. Fair State and Surly tried to make clear beer and ended up with two

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Food & Drink

variations of IPA neither would've made on their own. Now, if only state legislators would make it legal to tap collaboration beers at both locations...

BEST SUBURBAN BREWERY

Lift Bridge Brewing Company

1900 Tower Dr. W., Stillwater
888-430-2337

liftbridgebrewery.com

The destination brewery located on the banks of the St. Croix River has maintained a delicate balance between keeping pace with crafty trends and pleasing their staunchest supporters. Their brewers run the gamut between cranking out fun seltzers at a clip, stocking the taproom with rotating limited-release craft brews, whimsical non-alcoholic choices like Mini Donut Cream Soda and a ridiculously good rootbeer, and true Minnesota standards like Farm Girl and Hop Dish. This is why, since 2008, a visit to Lift Bridge has kept jaunts to Stillwater fruitful and fresh—unlike some of its stale, antique peers.

BEST TAPROOM

Urban Growler

2325 Endicott St., St. Paul
651-340-5793

urbangrowlerbrewing.com

It's a sunny Saturday afternoon and the patio at Urban Growler is packed, including a group of costumed runners and a cluster of preschoolers sipping house-made lemonade while their parents hoist pints of Cowbell Cream Ale and pass baskets of fries and tater tots. A great taproom starts with great beer, and Urban Growler has plenty of that—try the rich, beguiling De-Lovely Porter—but what sets it apart is a full (and excellent) food menu and an atmosphere without pretense. It's energetic but not boisterous, utterly welcoming, a place to linger. Bonus: It's the first woman-owned microbrewery in the state.

BEST BEER SELECTION IN A BAR

HopCat

435 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis
612-276-5555

hopcat.com/minneapolis

The Happy Gnome closed in December. The Muddy Pig in 2018. With both destination taphouses gone, a new king was set to rise. We're reluctant to give that spot on the altar to a chain restaurant, but HopCat's beer list is biblical. At a staggering 80 taps and 20 bottles/cans, the menu is a tome

of infallible decisions. You can get your standbys (Summit EPA), special releases (Surly Pentagon 2017), and even exotic foreigners (Westmalle Dubbel) right in the heart of downtown—which hopefully means HopCat will stick around and spread the gospel of good beer for years to come.

BEST SPEAKEASY

Volstead's Emporium

711 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
volsteads.com

Turn down the right alley in Uptown, knock on a nondescript door, earn the approval of the bouncer peeking out through the slot, and descend into the Prohibition era, complete with vintage wallpaper and booths cordoned off with velvet curtains. Like the speakeasies of yesteryear, Volstead's Emporium offers patrons an evening of escapism. Thankfully, the cocktails are a whole lot more refined than those bathtub gin concoctions of the 1920s (but possibly just as stiff). Settle in for the evening and live out those Jazz Age fantasies.

BEST HAPPY HOUR (AFTER WORK)

Memory Lanes

2520 26th Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-721-6211

memorylanes.com

Are huevos rancheros really an appetizer? Are fish and chips? Memory Lanes doesn't care, both are \$5 every damn day from 3 to 6 p.m., along with three other entree-sized "apps." Beers are even less (\$2.75 pints, \$3.25 cans, \$3.75 tallboys, \$11 pitchers), and booze is a cut-rate \$3.25 off the rail. The only thing that's full price is the bowling, but one need not be a roller to make this your go-to post-work drink spot. Belly up at the retro bar with a few colleagues from marketing and talk shit about the new VP while the sweet sounds of falling pins ring in the background.

Readers' Choice: Red Cow

BEST HAPPY HOUR (LATE NIGHT)

The Lowbrow

4244 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis
612-208-0720

thelowbrowmpls.com

When the doors open for brunch at the Lowbrow, there's a blitz. Parties of friends line up in their puffy vests for breakfast tacos and cava bellinis. But patience is the ultimate virtue at the Kingfield

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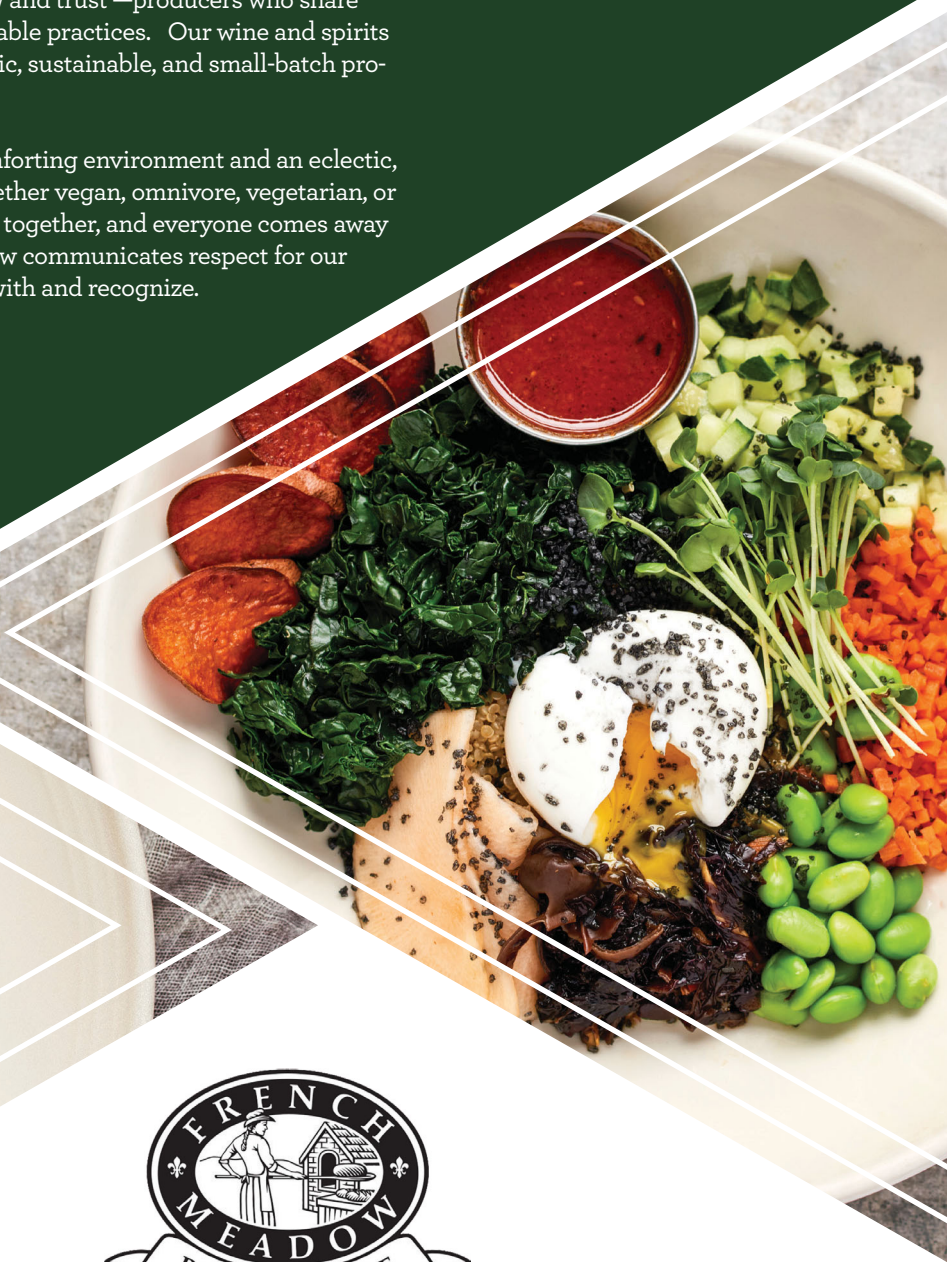
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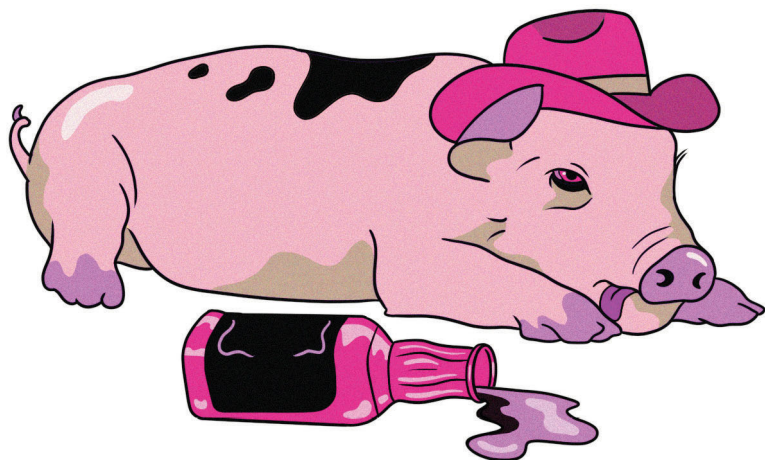
Now celebrating its 35th year, French Meadow Café represents the life work of founder Lynn Gordon: Serving our customers food that is pure, wholesome, and crafted with integrity and passion. As a pioneer in organics, French Meadow was a farm-to-table establishment long before that term became a catch-phrase, and we remain passionate about the strict organic and environmental standards that have been a guiding force since Lynn founded the country's first certified organic bakery in 1985.

Never sacrificing freshness or quality, French Meadow still crafts all our dishes and baked goods from scratch, from hand-rolled pasta to our signature sourdough pain levain; our fresh organic produce and meats are supplied by regional small-farm partners we know and trust —producers who share our commitment to humane, organic, hormone-free, and sustainable practices. Our wine and spirits menu reflects this vision as well, with an emphasis on biodynamic, sustainable, and small-batch producers, including seasonal on-tap craft beers and kombucha.

A central tenet of French Meadow remains offering guests a comforting environment and an eclectic, seasonally-inspired menu with “something for everyone” — whether vegan, omnivore, vegetarian, or gluten-free — where a group with mixed culinary needs can dine together, and everyone comes away feeling indulged and satisfied. Through our food, French Meadow communicates respect for our shared home on earth: Something our guests instantly connect with and recognize.



French Meadow Cafe & Bluestream Bar Restaurant | 2610 Lyndale Ave. S | Minneapolis
French Meadow Bakery & Cafe | 1662 Grand Ave. | Saint Paul
Sunday - Thursday: 7 am - 9 pm | Friday - Saturday: 7 am - 10 pm



haunt. Once the sun goes down and the brunchers garage their Volvos, the real party starts. The atmosphere relaxes, and a casual neighborhood vibe takes over the chaos. Beers and wine are half off from 9 to 10:30 p.m. So are nachos, you lush, so get two orders. Sunday night is showtime, though. Fend off the Scaries with a half-price bottle of wine starting at 4 p.m.

BEST WINTER DRINKING

City of Lakes Loppet Winter Festival

The Trailhead, 1221 Theodore Wirth Pkwy., Minneapolis
loppet.org

Bodysuited bike dads. Sweat-mopped snowshoers. Windburnt skijorers and their dogs. Come nightfall, all convene in the Loppet Village for an apres-everything. Surly hosted the beer garden this past year, inviting athletes and spectators alike to drink themselves warm again. As the sunset melts to icy night, bands step out onto the *fingers crossed* frozen surface of the Lake of the Isles lagoon to strump life back into limbs, while a fire burns mercifully next to a semicircle of hay bales. Line your snowsuit with your own private supply of Fireball and savor a perfect winter's drink.

BEST HANGOVER CURE

Go dutch with your hookup at Mayday Cafe

3440 Bloomington Ave. S., Minneapolis
 612-729-5627

Who is the sticky body wrapped in the sheet next to you? Where are your glasses, and all your cash? Important questions, yes, but first, your gut gurgles. If you don't eat, you'll die, and you gotta assume your mate feels the same. Your eyes feel like hot balls of nickel burning through your skull, so wash that face with cold water

and head to Mayday Cafe, where you and the stranger can order a blackberry cream cheese danish and a vegetarian sausage egg and cheese sandwich because your brain is too soupy to decide between sugar and grease. Suck down a couple of iced coffees and finally get to know each other while your bodies restore to working order.

BEST DRUNK FOOD

A Slice of New York

2407 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis
 612-871-4334
sliceofnewyorkmn.com

Whomst among us can feign innocence when it comes to Long Nights™ that end in seeking a final destination that slings morning-saving grease-sops? But where to aim one's chariot? Doth a purveyor of pepperoni slices beckon? Mayhaps a buffalo wing specialist? Or a house of fried potatoes? But what of a gyro artisan? Nay, a sojourn to A Slice of New York means not choosing *between* the above, but choosing *all* of the above. Plus, Slice indulges folks who can't be trusted with a paper plate (have a stromboli!), or just wanna treat ourselves (*mmm baklava!*) when we definitely should've been asleep hours ago.

Readers' Choice: Pizza Lucé

BEST SPORTS BAR

St. Paul Tap

825 Jefferson Ave., St. Paul
 651-227-6315
stpaultapmn.com

St. Paul Tap was introduced to St. Paul spectators in a noisy neon flash. What had once been a middling American pub, Tavern on the Avenue, suddenly became a shimmering barcade. Cabinet games, pinball machines, and one absurdly long foosball table fill the space with active, beer-swilling bodies. TVs blare with basketball games and Call of Duty competitions. It's easy to get swept

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Food & Drink

up, and that's the idea. The wall-to-wall diversions help ramp up guests for a night at the nearby Xcel Energy Center. Good thing hockey jerseys are roomy, because their nigh-inexhaustible burger menu demands pregame hedonism.

Readers' Choice: Bunny's Bar & Grill

BEST PARTY BAR

Honey

205 E. Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis
612-746-0306

honeympls.com

The strip of Hennepin as you enter Northeast is a Yuppie wasteland. A Chipotle, a diminished second-gen Nye's, and the Cities' umpteenth Punch Pizza, all giving way to a fucking Noodles & Company. But beneath an Asian fusion restaurant hides a haven of weirdness, like a thumping crypt where nights feel endless. Fridays and Saturdays at Honey are often host to events like local hip-hop release shows, drag dinners, and dueling house DJs, but the theme is almost immaterial. If you want to escape from the late-capitalist nightmare of condotown, find the door in Ginger Hop and descend to a party oasis.

BEST GIMMICK

Extreme Christmas

For the past several years, Lawless Distilling has spent the holidays looking like a deranged Santa decorated the joint—copious tinsel, thousands of shiny dangling ornaments, twinkling lights all over the place. But this year, they weren't the only ones going snowballs to the wall. Betty Danger's got festive with the second-annual Mary's Christmas Palace, which ran for three full months (!), and in Excelsior, Old Log Theatre's Jingle Bar was a hygge-heavy winter wonderland where guests drank spiked hot chocolate by the roaring hearth. All the holiday cheer, none of the shopping, wrapping, or fighting with your drunk, Trump-loving uncle.

BEST SMOKING PATIO

331 Club

331 13th Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-331-1746

331club.com

Picture the patio at the 331 Club on a warm night. Two or three dozen people line the wall on one side, encircle the tables on another. A band is tuning up onstage; the one that just got off is out back with a drink. As you pan this scene in your head... is anyone not smoking? If you're trying to quit or get to bed, we

don't recommend walking this stretch of University Avenue at night. You'll see someone you know, and they will be having a better night than you, and you'll find yourself gripped by a craving for companionship... among other things.

BEST CAFE

Duck Duck Coffee

1830 E. 38th St., Minneapolis
612-234-5802

duckduckmpls.com

Friendly, human, and never "too cool," Duck Duck Coffee is the cafe your smart, nerdy, punk aunt would open. It's comfy, quirky, and void of pretension—which makes it an equally nice place to work or kill time, whether with a board game or arcade favorite. The homey atmosphere and community-driven experience really make this place shine, although the damned good pint-size miel and well-made Americano don't hurt, either. Doodle at an art night and nibble on a house-baked cookie, or join their book club and chug some delicious decaf while discussing plot points.

BEST BREAKFAST

Al's Breakfast

413 14th Ave. SE, Minneapolis
612-331-9991

alsbreakfastmpls.com

Al's Breakfast has survived a series of scares in the face of an exponentially changing Dinkytown, some of which have fiercely rattled the nerves of its patrons. Most notable has been the absence of former co-owner Doug Grina's voice as Al's supplemental soundtrack each day. Yet so much hasn't changed at all: There's still a stool for every ass in search of a hot breakfast to start the day, and the menu—from the decadent Jose breakfast, to a short stack of blueberry walnut pancakes—can still inspire, winning hearts and minds. Never sleep on a classic.

Readers' Choice: Keys Cafe & Bakery

BEST BREAKFAST ON THE GO

The Chewery

350 S. Fifth St., Minneapolis
612-353-4106

Everyone (and we mean everyone) loves an egg on a bun, done just right. For proof, look no further than the bowels of City Hall, where letter carriers on break, battle-hardened lawyers pausing between rounds, office drones, and civil servants all queue up just to wait for a fistful of greatness: the Chewery's #1 Breakfast Sandwich. Made ooey-goey with egg, pecan-smoked bacon, cheddar,



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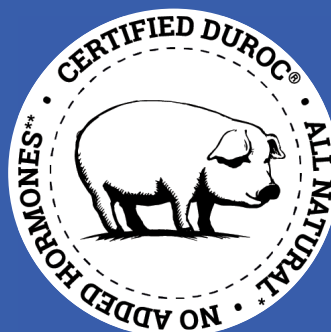
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and maple aioli on an onion-cheddar bialy, this eminently portable day-starter costs six bills, demands just as many napkins, and is made even more enjoyable for the chat you'll inevitably have with Lori James, the joint's owner, as she rings you up.

BEST BRUNCH

Modern Times

3200 Chicago Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-886-3882

moderntimesmpls.com

Brunch is best eaten in groups, and Modern Times has something for everyone. With the menu available into the early evening both Saturday and Sunday, fans of mid-morning meals will find comfort in the scrambles, filled with locally sourced meats (or tempeh) and hearty vegetables. Or, those more inclined to the "unch" part of brunch can enjoy a variety of sandwiches. Plant-based eaters will be happy to know that most items can be veganized, and Modern Times' tofu replacement for eggs is incredibly flavorful. Even classic breakfast folks will find satisfying pancakes, French toast, and oatmeal on the delightfully funky menu.

Readers' Choice: Hell's Kitchen

BEST PANCAKES

Granola Cakes at Bryant-Lake Bowl

810 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-825-3737

bryantlakebowl.com

Unless you're five years old, it's hard to get excited about paying for pancakes at a restaurant, so a flapjack has to be real special to recommend it; the Granola Cakes from good ol' BLB come with a big thumbs-up. These huge discs of deliciousness are made with a traditional batter laced with home-made granola. One bite might be cakey, while another boasts chewy dried fruit followed by a crunch from an oat cluster. Spread a scoop of butter on this baby, and smother it in maple syrup if you've got a killer sweet tooth. For those dubious of these pancakes' sheer awesomeness, we suggest sharing an order with the table. You'll soon end up snacking away until it's gone.

Readers' Choice:
Original Pancake House

BEST BAGELS

Asa's Bakery

3507 23rd Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-615-9132

asasbakery.com

When Asa Diebold's south Minneapolis bakery opened at the end of 2019, it immediately began selling out of bagels and bialys well before listed closing times. A three-day fermentation develops sourdough notes and a dense, chewy crumb, but presents a very real space limitation for the tiny shop. Still Diebold remains unrelenting in the attention to detail that garnered word-of-mouth

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raves since his days as a farmers market vendor—like his all-over coating of seeds and the addition of aromatic fennel to the standard everything bagel. Don't sleep on their vibrant whitefish salad sandwich—and try a bialy, too, if any remain.

BEST BISCUITS

Standish Cafe

2403 E. 38th St., Minneapolis
612-886-3443
standish-cafe.com

Biscuits are too often either hockey pucks using rich costumes of garnish to disguise their dense horrors, or cost a fortune at the hand of pastry chefs. Not so at the Standish Cafe, dear reader. Here, they stick to an ideal formula that produces snowflake-perfect drop biscuits for each guest, with flaky layers deposited like an ideal, late-wintertime snowball. Their nubs beg to be broken off and snacked upon long after bellies bulge from Standish's mains, leaving us sopping and slathering those crags in butter and honey as long our pants' buttons dare, and only 'cause we wanna.

BEST COFFEE SHOP

Northern Coffeeworks

1027 S. Washington Ave., Minneapolis
612-353-4222
northerncoffeeworks.com

Northern Coffeeworks is that rare breed of coffee shop that combines the artistry of third-wave coffee culture with the warmth of a cozy neighborhood hangout. They roast their own coffee, serve a full brunch menu, and deliver lattes tableside without disturbing the milk-foam rosette on top. Like the coffee shop's namesake climate, the drink menu changes with the seasons, but its focus on local and housemade ingredients is a constant. Luckily, some of the best selections are offered year-round, like the orange lavender latte, which has a delicately herbal, just-sweet-enough quality that's as unique as the surroundings.

Readers' Choice:

Spyhouse Coffee Roasters

BEST COFFEE ROASTER

Roots Roasting

1552 Saint Clair Ave., St. Paul
651-243-1200
rootsroasting.com

A concoction as critical to an economy's success as coffee should be taken seriously. Roots Roasting's passionate team of coffee lovers understands the importance of process—from the beans to the cup.

Their beans are expertly roasted in-house and they sell a selection of six roasts, all crafted with the earth and community in mind. From using a low-emission water scrubbing technique and compostable cups, to donating a portion of profits to ending slavery and trafficking, Roots Roasting's shop has made itself the Twin Cities' best for swinging in for a taste or asking the famously kind team any questions you have. They opened a roastery to have a relationship with the community, after all.

BEST TEA SHOP

Jinx Tea

4503 France Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-367-4797
jinxtea.com

Looking to venture into a world of sipping that hints more readily at clouds and departures than earthen allegiances? Head straight for Jinx Tea, the Scandinavian-modern cafe located on the cusp of Linden Hills and Edina. Small bursts of brilliance are in abundance at Jinx, and sometimes they cascade straight from the tap. Hot and cold potions come in rainbow hues, mixed in palettes of mind-boggling complexity, available in textures that run the gamut from iced to frizzante, steaming to boba, and in sizes from wee to full growler. Never before has tea been this seriously fun.

BEST BAKERY

Rose Street Patisserie

171 Snelling Ave. N., St. Paul
651-556-4488
rocestreet.co

The Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie is the baking world cup, where elite bakers join to compete every four years. Rose Street's Kate Goodpaster and her crew represented the United States in 2020, and her mentor, chef John Kraus, has medaled before. You don't have to know any of this to enjoy Rose Street's goods, where displays full of delicate confections delight the eye and make selecting nearly impossible. The task of choosing is inconsequential, for you'll end up melting over any and every pastry. If you're utterly stymied, go with the buttery maple Kouign Amann; it's in a class by itself.

BEST DOUGHNUTS

Mel-O-Glaze Bakery

4800 28th Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-729-9316
meloglazebakery.com

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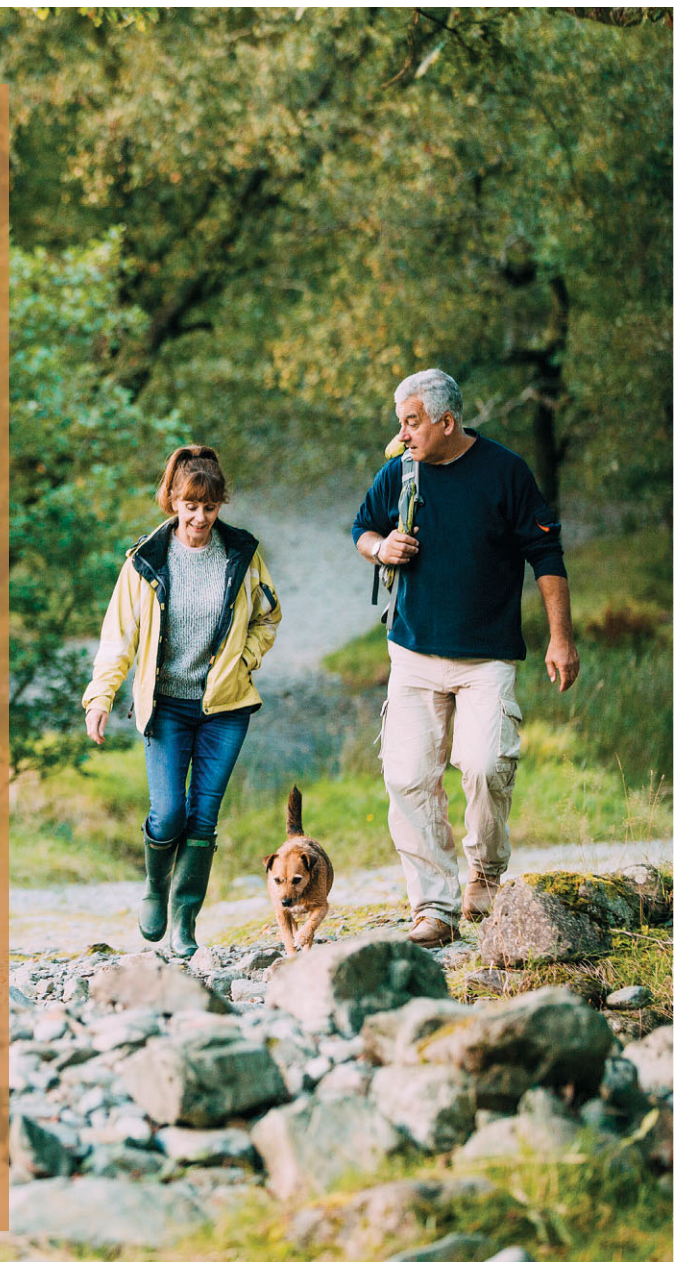
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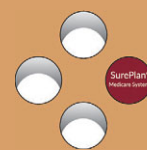
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Before there were sugar-bomb cereals, neon-colored yogurt in tubes, or unicorn frappes, there were doughnuts: simple, beautiful wads of sugar-fried dough intended to deliver a sweet punch of energy to start the day off right. For over 70 years, Mel-O-Glaze has been serving up sweets to folks who visit its charming south Minneapolis shop. They've got apple fritters, chocolate eclairs, sprinkles galore, and bear claws the size of your head. But what Mel-O-Glaze really specializes in is the perfect glazed doughnut: fresh, warm, and ready to melt in your mouth. Arrive early enough to grab their doughnut holes, which staff attest are legendarily addictive.

Readers' Choice: Glam Doll Donuts

BEST CANDY STORE

Candyland

Multiple locations
candylandstore.com

The first thing customers notice about Candyland is its smell: an intoxicating aroma of caramel popcorn mingled with fresh chocolate. That caramel corn is a crucial ingredient in Candyland's beloved (and trademarked) Chicago Mix, which balances clumps of caramelized popcorn with seasoned and cheddar-dusted pieces. Like their iconic popcorn, Candyland's chocolates aren't fancy, but are made with care and imbued with nostalgia. They offer straightforward peanut butter cups and

caramels alongside fudge and almond clusters. While there, don't forget to stock up on saltwater taffy and a giant jawbreaker or two—having an adult-sized budget in a candy store is a glorious thing.

BEST CHOCOLATE

Legacy Chocolates

141 Fourth St. E. #229, St. Paul
651-340-5252
legacychocolates.com

The A-listers at Legacy Chocolates are the truffles, offered in cocoa intensities ranging from 41 to 99 percent. Flavors include a richly fruity raspberry, a well-balanced sweet-and-salty Himalayan caramel, and ever-changing liqueur varieties spiked with local spirits. But don't overlook the ultra-chocolatey baked goods, like chocolate zucchini cake, chocolate-studded scones, and dense, fudge-like brownies. Wash it all down with a shot of sipping chocolate, a bittersweet beverage reminiscent of guzzling from one of those chocolate fountains—except that it's socially acceptable and easily attainable on a weekday afternoon.

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3333 Cliff Road

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*Signal Hills
*St. Thomas More

1225 S. Robert St
1093 Summit Ave

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200 W. Burnsville Pkwy
7100 West 147th St.
20965 Holyoke Ave

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June 20 – Sept 26

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stpaulfarmersmarket.com

Food & Drink

ear, ready to act on indulgent impulses. Feeling daunted by choosing between five different cone flavors, settling on a base soft-serve flavor, only to pick which cereal concoction best meshes with everything? There is no wrong choice here! This is a playground made of decadence, designed for minds and tastebuds. What matters most is indulging your sweet tooth—ensuring it's living its best life—and releasing your inner child.

Readers' Choice: Izzy's Ice Cream

BEST INSTAGRAMMABLE FOOD

Black Walnut Bakery

3157 Hennepin Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-353-6552

blackwalnutbakery.com

Observe a perfectly round lemon tart with its snappy shortbread hugging sunshiney custard, kissed with a dollop of cream and a flower petal, or the deep-mahogany exterior and soft peaks of toasted meringue on a pineapple-coconut cake, while gooey chocolate chips wink at you from burnished brown cookies flecked with oats, and it makes sense why people have a tendency to waltz into Black Walnut and immediately start snapping pics. So much screams to be 'grammed before it's bitten. Don't deny your desires. Shamelessly snap away, because these beautiful treats *deserve* the spotlight.

BEST POP-UP RESTAURANT

Queer Soup Night

Blue Collar Supper Club at Modist Brewing Co., 505 N. Third St., Minneapolis

queersoupsnight.com

Pairing dancing with hot soup may sound like a hazardous combo, but it makes for an amazing pop-up. Blue Collar Supper Club hosted Queer Soup Night, packing Modist Brewing's event space twice in 2019. Rotating chefs offered chowders that didn't skimp on the seafood, soups that tasted like memories of your favorite backyard barbecue, and veg-friendly options with beans and veggies cheerily bobbing in bouillon, all ready to be washed down with Modist's beers. QSN brings together soup, burlesque, and bumpin' tunes to fundraise for various local queer organizations, made accessible to all.

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Animales Barbeque Co.

1121 Quincy St. NE, Minneapolis
612-400-2153

animalesbarbeque.com

Jon Wipfli and company have kept the spring and summer months both steamy

and smoky, luring countless patrons with the magic they create in a little nook behind Able Seedhouse and Brewery. From Fried Cheese Chicken Birria Tacos, to randomly dressing up as McDonald's during the fall to give folks a savory taste of their version of a Big Mac, it's no doubt that Animales' grill induces only the very best meat sweats at every turn.

Readers' Choice: Potter's Pasties

BEST FARMERS MARKET

Midtown Farmers Market

3032 Minnehaha Ave., Minneapolis
612-724-7457

midtownfarmersmarket.org

We once heard a Midtown Farmers Market vendor (who shall remain nameless) describe it as "the old hippie farmers market." And that's exactly what makes it so great! It's small; it's close-knit; it feels by and for the community it's in. (Case in point: It was the first MN farmers market to accept SNAP-EBT.) And as the market works to establish a more permanent space, it's located in the parking lot of the wonderful Moon Palace Books/Geek Love Cafe, which means you can pick up a paperback and sip an iced coffee while you shop for the week's healthy, GMO-free produce. Is there a better way to spend a Saturday morning?

BEST SEAFOOD

Grand Catch

1672 Grand Ave., St. Paul
651-348-8541

grandcatchmn.com

Sameh Wadi and Thien Ly are the local seafood world's equivalent of Andre 3000 and Big Boi. Armed to the teeth with sauces, spice levels, and add-ons to make a boil experience as scrumptious and spicy as possible, they've taken the concept of a boil and elevated it to dizzying, delicious new heights. Not into cracking sea bug shells? The duo offers a plethora of entrees, appetizers, and brunch specials that incorporate crab, shrimp, and/or lobster in more delicate, still equally delectable fashions, ensuring creative flavor reigns supreme.

BEST SPLURGE

Shellfish Tower at 4 Bells

1610 Harmon Place, Minneapolis

Nothing screams decadence like a three-dimensional monument to extravagance, packed on ice to near-overflowing with a menagerie of sea creatures: shucked-to-order oysters, shrimp cocktail, and lobster tails are typical inclusions, possibly with

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Food & Drink

mussels, scallops, or clams, sometimes whatever strikes the fish-buyer's fancy. While any \$200-plus add-on can turn an outing from special to extra-extraordinary, 4 Bells' takes the top spot for their addition of sumac-laden scallop ceviche, snapper crudo, and the "Should we? Let's!"-iest of cracker toppings: caviar. Go ahead! 'Cause you're all that and a side of cocktail sauce.

BEST STEAK

Lindey's Prime Steak House

3600 Snelling Ave. N., Arden Hills
651-633-9813

theplaceforsteak.com

In America's modern dining free-for-all, Lindey's has stayed in business at the corner of Nowhere and Neverheardofit since 1958 by serving a menu that's just four options large—no, not "long"... go and see what we mean! Each steak arrives cooked to perfection, delivered with service so timelessly warm that even the most unruly steer (or customer) would be pacified by Lindey's charms. Steaks are accompanied with non-negotiable bottomless salad, grease-less hashbrowns, warm garlic bread, and pickled watermelon rind in quantities so bountiful that Lindey's seems invested in stuffing its patrons not just today and tomorrow, but for another 60 years.

Readers' Choice: Manny's Steakhouse

BEST RAMEN

Zen Box Izakaya

602 S. Washington Ave., Minneapolis
612-332-3936

zenbox.com

The palpable loveliness at the core of Minneapolis's grandfather of all ramen shops is traceable to its proprietors' gigantic hearts seeping into their work. Otherwise, surely such patience, rigor, and focus would have worn thin over the years, leaving Zen Box's multi-day cauldrons of heritage pork bone broth short of its reliable perfection? Or perhaps the menu's MaPo Tofu Mazemen ramen would be lacking for its dearth of broth? But no. This, too, shines brightly, as if propelled by some inner might straight into the marrow of all who visit Zen Box's tiny stronghold. We only hope this precious, methodical work—especially those Saturday specials—continues to prevail against all flashy newbie pretenders.

Readers' Choice: Ramen Kazama

BEST SUSHI

Momo Sushi

1839 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-789-9190

momosushimn.com

Ever sit down to lunch, order a few sushi rolls to share, then order another two or three sushi rolls to share, then order some more rolls to share, then... order again? This keeps happening to us at Momo Sushi: more, more sushi. "How about the smoked salmon and the eel avocado? The shrimp tempura was great, should we get the salmon tempura? That spider roll looks wild, can we try that? I don't know about you all, but I could go for another eel avocado." Luckily, an excellent lunch special—two rolls for \$8 or three for \$11—means we've been able to do it without going fully sushi broke. (Yet.) Get the momo too, if you have room after all the rolls.

Readers' Choice: Wakame Sushi & Asian Bistro

BEST BARBECUE

Smoke in the Pit

3733 Chicago Ave., Minneapolis
612-315-3145

smokeinthepit.com

We have this tendency, when anything bills itself as the best "this" in Minnesota, to want to debunk that claim. Unfortunately—but actually quite fortunately—for us, Smoke in the Pit, which proclaims itself the best barbecue in the state, truly might be. There are the wings: tender, juicy little morsels you'll want at least a double order of. But you might be surprised to learn that it's the pulled pork sandwich we go for most often. Maybe it's not what you'd think to order at a barbecue when there are rib tips and smoked turkey legs on the menu, but it's a quiet show-stealer nonetheless. Do yourself a favor and round it all out with mac and cheese *and* slaw. You'll want the whole smoky shebang.

Readers' Choice: Revival

BEST PIZZA

Boludo

3749 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis
612-965-2858

boludoempanadas.com

This low-lit empanada spot is also a bangin' pizza place packed with folks getting their hands on these oblong discs. Perfect for two or an ambitious solo eating act, their crust is pizza perfection. It comes bubbled and crisp with salt-flecked edges, airy but structured enough to hold Boludo's high quality, mouth-watering toppings. Their simple pepperoni and Margarita pizzas feature an ideal San Marzano sauce. Feeling funkier? Dig into the fragrant dill-draped Peras pizza topped with creamy, potent gorgonzola sprinkled over pear and pine-nuts. Don't want to wait



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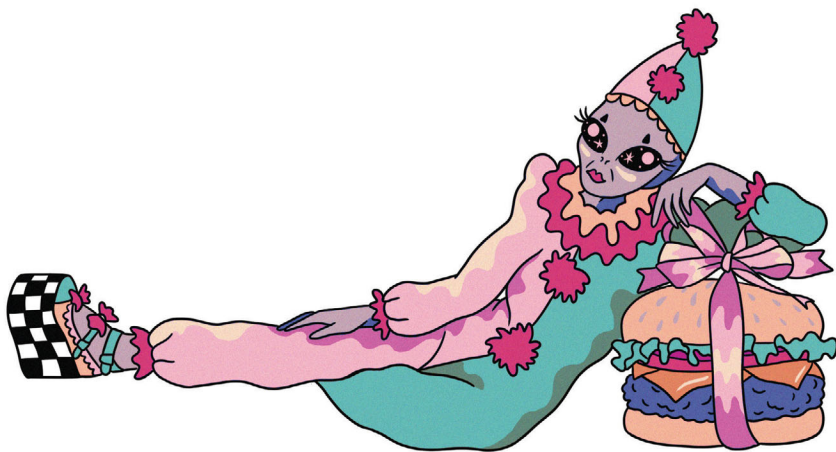


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to sit and eat? Take those pies to go! The way we inhale these things, there probably shouldn't be witnesses, anyway.

Readers' Choice: Pizza Lucé

BEST LUNCH

Zettas

2424 Nicollet Ave., Suite B,
Minneapolis
763-325-3190
zettasmpls.com

If someone were to say “zettas” translated to mean “lunch” in a lost language, we’d believe them in a heartbeat. Eat Street’s tiniest shop of wonders—nestled between a tailor and Boost Mobile, in case you’re still overlooking it—punches well above its weight. By combining ricotta, greens, meats, and spice in inventive ways, Zettas forges a truce between what we want to scarf midday (a cheesy sandwich mixing savory and sweet) with what we’re “supposed” to fuel our bodies with (light, vitamin-rich, leafy greens). Each portable flatbread satisfies without burying an anchor in our gut, sending us out the door ready to face the setting sun.

Readers' Choice: French Meadow

BEST CHEAP EATS

The Fremont's

Two-Dollar Tuesdays

1300 Lagoon Ave. #100, Minneapolis
612-345-4172
thefremontmpls.com

So you hop on a bar stool. You order a burger and a beer. Then another beer, and another beer. Then you decide you want wings, and—what the hell?—another beer before you head out. But when the bill arrives, the total is *squints*... 12 bucks? It's not a server error; it's Two Dollar Tuesday at the Fremont, where wings, beers, burgers, and rail drinks are all available for a two spot. When you have to *really*

try to spend 20 bucks on dinner? That's exactly the kind of cheap we are.

BEST BURGER

Dipped & Debris

2422 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis
612-800-9424
dippedanddebris.com

Northeast's Dipped & Debris has no desire to improve on a classic. Instead, they honor this almighty American standard by keeping it simple, pushing their version to a cheeseburger's near-Platonic ideal by focusing on a few important details. Two well-seasoned beef patties are smashed for a crispy Maillard sear and topped with melty American cheese, sweet, crunchy diced raw onions, and evenly distributed dill pickles on top. A buttered, toasted squishy bun holds the whole thing together. Ketchup and mustard are available, but try a couple of bites first—you might not need them. Even if this burger weren't only \$7, it would still be our favorite.

Readers' Choice: Matt's Bar

BEST MEATLESS BURGER

Mac Attack at Trio Plant-Based

610 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
612-326-1326
trioplantbased.com

Trio specializes in delivering plant-based soul food, and offers several burger options. The best is big in flavor and leans toward comfort food on the palate. The Mac Attack is a Beyond Burger topped with more of their staple mac and cheese than the bun can hold. But it's not just regular old mac and cheese—it's buffalo mac and cheese, drizzled with their ranch dressing. This wild mix of textures and flavors keeps taste buds busy, but still lets each ingredient have its own chance to shine, creating an ideal meatless burger experience.

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BEST FRIES

The Naughty Greek's "Naughty Fries"

Multiple locations
thenaughtygreek.com

Sometimes a massive pile of salty, fatty snack food is exactly what a human being needs and deserves. The Naughty Greek knows this. The Naughty Greek understands. The fries are, as described, naughty—thin, crispy, and ruddy with seasoning. More importantly, they're half-buried in a snowdrift of crumbled feta cheese and herbs. Is it unconventional to eat your French fries with a fork? Perhaps. But if it means cramming as much cheese and potato in your mouth as possible, you'll get no argument from us. Stuff some of these babies in your gyro, if you want. It won't hurt, and we won't judge.

Readers' Choice: Red Cow

BEST HOT DOG

Uncle Franky's

728 Broadway St. NE, Minneapolis
612-455-2181
unclefrankys.com

Even if making hot dogs is a low art, it still has masters, and Uncle Franky's is its da Vinci. This ballpark maestro can turn a tube of rendered beef into canvas. Trails of coleslaw and chili cross above a hotlink to create the Hot Lydia Link. A swipe of yellow mustard, a trickling of raw onion, and cheese whiz, voila, the Geo Dog. But it is with great restraint and respect to the classics that Frank creates his masterpiece: the most astutely composed Chicago dog in all of Minnesota. Do not speak the word "ketchup" in its presence.

BEST FRIED CHICKEN

Soul Bowl's Big K.R.I.T. Sandwich

520 N. Fourth St., Minneapolis
612-567-7044
soulbowlmn.com

2019 was The Year of the Fried Chicken Sandwich, which meant tossing the bucket out the window, and no one accepted that challenge quite like Soul Bowl. After running pop-ups around town, Soul Bowl's summertime food hall debut in the North Loop was ideally timed to premiere their Big K.R.I.T. sandwich. This lordly feast starts with a geologically battered fried chicken breast served on an everything seasoned bun, then adds some never-mealy cherry tomatoes primed to pop, crisp mixed greens, and snappy turkey

bacon, and is finished off with a drizzle of MPLS Mambo (sweet honey hot sauce)... and a truly priceless blessing from the rapper himself.

BEST WINGS

Cedar Inn

4155 Cedar Ave., Minneapolis
612-729-9785
cedarinnmpls.com

Comically large with the tips still attached, the Cedar Inn's wings have been called "pterodactyl" by those who've sampled these messy, tasty treats. Though we don't know where these beasts are harvested, they're served meaty and low in gristle. The wings' high-crunch exterior maintains a steaming, tender interior—no rubbery chicken here! Sauce highlights include a peppery, vinegary magma-orange Buffalo (matching the bar's Harley-themed decor) and a sweet-gingery Asian Sticky option. A half-dozen wings are more than enough for two people. Toss in some High Lives and access to TouchTunes, and that's a solid, divey dinner.

Readers' Choice: Blue Door Pub

BEST TACOS

Tacos El Kevin

3751 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-964-8818
facebook.com/tacoelekevin

For proof that the Twin Cities' best taco eatery lives in a tiny south Minneapolis convenience store, look to the fact that said taco eatery is slowly overtaking said convenience store. Tables have replaced the shelves where Portland Market once packed rows of snacking staples, and while you can still get a big bag of Doritos here, you'll have to weave past the line of folks waiting to order tender carnitas, steak, asada, and pollo from Tacos El Kevin. Actually: No. Put down the snack chips and order from TEK. At just \$2 a pop, their seasoned meat and griddled tortilla marvels give way more bang for your buck—prepped fast, portioned generously, and paired with bright-orange homemade hot sauce you'll be begging to buy in bulk.

Readers' Choice: Taco Cat

BEST PHO

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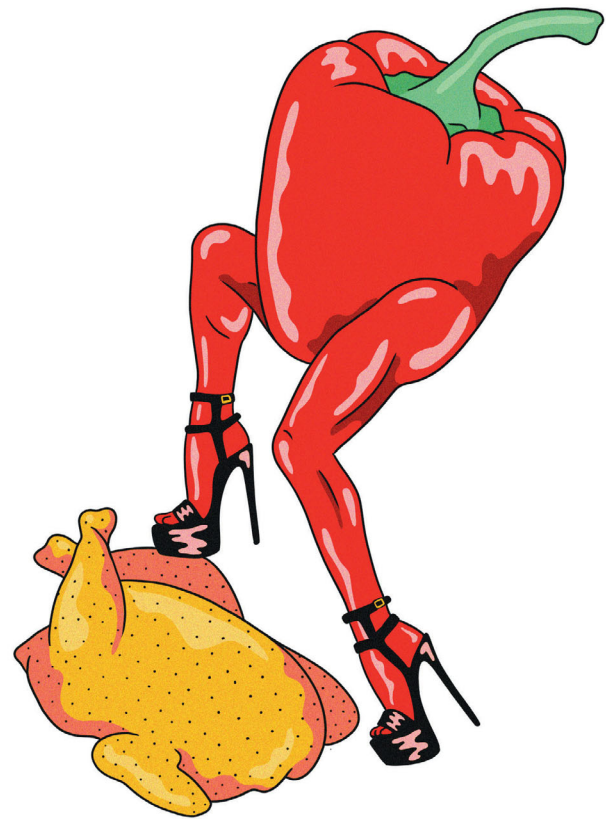
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Food & Drink



sets apart Pho Pasteur. Their customizable renditions are potently delicious, with savory broths seemingly spiced and simmered to flush out the tundra's worst with each slurp. A bowl of Pho Ga or Pho Tai Chin Nac (mixed to taste with the right balance of fresh basil, limes, and snappy jalapenos) serves a vicious haymaker to even the worst ailments out there. Pair any of the pho with steaming hot Jasmine tea and walk out a swaggering winner.

BEST SALAD

Farmers Market Salad at Black Sheep Coal Fired Pizza

Multiple locations
blacksheeppizza.com

Yes, we're telling you to go to a pizza joint and order vegetables, but the Farmers Market Salad truly never disappoints. The menu leaves off the dish's particulars so it's a blind order... and that's fun! Ingredients change daily. Summertime plates have been known to feature exuberances of watermelon and feta, or fresh strawberries and spinach alongside chunks of rank bleu. In the autumn, chunks of squash and apple may duke it out against a background of the kitchen's vinaigrette du jour. Snowy winter days often feel brighter thanks to julienned carrots commingling with golden raisins, cracked black pepper, and chevre. Just trust us (and them) with this.

BEST SANDWICH

The Cubano at Manny's Tortas

920 E. Lake St. #125, Minneapolis
612-870-3930

mannystortas.com

Any good torta starts with quality bread, and this is no exception. Manny's broad, fluffy white roll has a delightful chew, doesn't scrape the roof of your mouth, and is toasted to perfection on their sizzling flat top. Add a gracious smear of deftly seasoned refried beans and then top with Manny's twist on Cubano meats: ribbons of slightly sweet ham and slices of tender pork loin in lieu of softer-cooked pork roasts often found on cubanos. These salty, savory meats are draped in melty cheese, then get refreshing lettuce, tomato, and onion, plus some cooling avocado, and pickled jalapenos for a final pucker of acid and heat.

BEST DELICATESSEN

Sikora's Polish Market & Deli

1625 Washington St. NE, Minneapolis
612-789-0907

sikorapolishmarket.com

For such a cozy space, Sikora's packs in a lot of Poland. It's got jars of pickles and a meat case resplendent with sausages, a freezer stocked with pickled herring, pints of bigos (a meat and sauerkraut-laden stew), and all kinds of pierogi. There's no sit-down area or counter for takeaway,

Food & Drink

but there are self-service stations for fresh paczki—palm-sized glazed doughnuts with various fillings—and hot kielbasa waiting in a steam tray for you to plop into a roll and chow down. Sikora's is tidy and calm, all the better for browsing.

BEST NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY

Dragon Star Oriental Foods

633 Minnehaha Ave. W., St. Paul
651-488-2567

Take Costco's size, add the affordability of your favorite community market, and inject it with grocery staples from across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and you get Frogtown's Dragon Star Foods. The front of the store has standard grocery items at incredible prices and quantities: three bunches of cilantro or a pound of kale for under a dollar, alongside dragon fruit and lemongrass stalks, peppers, herbs, and greens. Meanwhile the back evolves into a warehouse of every global grocery item your heart desires: two full aisles of ramen, with every seasoning, paste, flavor cube, and jarred sauce imaginable. Juju berries. Ghee. Palm oil.... Oh my!

BEST INTERNATIONAL GROCERY

United Noodles

2015 E. 24th St., Minneapolis; 7730
Hudson Rd., Woodbury
612-721-6677; 651-756-8848
unitednoodles.com

United Noodles dazzles for the sheer vastness of its pan-Asian inventory: colorful bags of snack food, dozens of varieties of packaged noodles, an entire aisle of soy sauce, gift-worthy boxes of mochi, freezers full of dumplings. Even better is that this bounty is well-signed and carefully organized; produce items like jackfruit even have placards with preparation and serving instructions to demystify and educate. There are also full-service meat and seafood counters, and the in-store UniDeli serves darn good ramen. At United Noodles, grocery shopping is never a chore—it's a delightful exploration.

BEST LIQUOR STORE

Morelli's Market

535 Tedesco St., St. Paul
651-774-5961
morellismarket.com

Any liquor store offering soul-nourishing lasagna to go with a case of Grain Belt is The Best Liquor Store. Morelli's supplements the benefits of a full liquor store—craft beer, local booze, and canned wine—with

the joys of a small Italian market. Besides lasagna in the freezer, there are also towers of pizza, pints of gelato, housemade Italian seasoning mix, pasta and barbecue sauces, and "Handy Packs" containing four boneless chicken breasts, four sirloin steaks, six boneless pork chops, six ground sirloin patties, and a two-pound boneless ham. The market's well-rounded selection of food and drink and a casual air make this historic one-stop shop an absolute delight to visit for provisions—liquid or solid. Just make sure to bring cash; no cards are accepted.

Readers' Choice: Surdyk's

BEST SKYWAY EATS

Afro Deli

705 Marquette Ave. S., Minneapolis;
55 Fifth St. E., St. Paul
612-584-4242; 651-528-6459
afrodeli.com

During peak hours, negotiating the skyways can feel like solving a too-difficult math problem, where a meal becomes the prize for a job well done. As hungry herds beat down from behind, adding an extra layer of urgency to making choices in close quarters, let Afro Deli's playful fusion of African, Mediterranean, and American dishes be your haven. Their menu of entirely Halal items caters to plant-based, gluten-free, and omnivorous eaters with options that burst with flavor. Start with an outstanding slow-cooked chicken curry with roasted eggplant and peppers, served over rice and/or couscous, or more snackable items like a savory sambusa trio, or side of tahini hummus and pita.

BEST AIRPORT EATS

Leeann Chin

MSP Terminal 1
612-564-1230
mspairport.com/airport/eat-shop-relax/leeann-chin

At the mouth of Concourse C, a quick-service version of the original Chinese-Minnesotan restaurant empire is tucked away and dimly lit, ideal for a quick recharge and refill. They serve a breakfast bahn mi with cage-free eggs, applewood smoked bacon, chili mayo, and kimchi, while a lunch and dinnertime combo entrée costs less than \$9, and may be the best value in the airport. For dessert, there's red cherry froyo and chocolate dipped fortune cookies. Though a nearby marquee flashes a classic Bloody Mary, why not expand your horizons? Leann Chin's menu includes a dozen cocktails and a Japanese boilermaker made with Sapporo and Hakutsuru sake. Also, real humans still work here.



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Food & Drink

BEST COOKBOOK

Fish by Jon Wipfli

When he's not busy churning out some of the best smoky treats in town at Anímales Barbeque Co., prolific meat man Jon Wipfli can often be found hunting, or fishing, or writing about hunting and fishing. His first cookbook, the outstanding *Venison*, demystified the art of cooking your kill with modern takes on deer-based dishes. With *Fish*, he's brought the same care to... fish. *Fish* offers up a collection of tasty and stylishly photographed step-by-steps on harvesting, cleaning, and cooking freshwater catches—made accessible even to the scaling-and-gutting newbie. And better yet, Wipfli teaches you how to do it all sustainably.

BEST STATE FAIR FOOD

**Jalapeño Cheese Curds at
Miller's Flavored Cheese Curds**

Nelson Street, next to the Giant Slide
At the State Fair, a balanced meal means an old-school fried food in one hand and something new and novel in the other. Miller's Flavored Cheese Curds offers a bit of each, rebooting a fair staple with flavors like ranch, garlic, and jalapeño. It's those last ones you want, with their flecks of actual pepper, which provide moderate but noticeable heat—a rarity at the Great Minnesota Eat-Together. The combination of spicy/salty/crunchy/creamy/goosey hits all the right notes, and even if you're not sharing, they'll be gone in an instant.

Readers' Choice: Cheese curds

BEST TRANSFORMATION

Revolution Hall to Potluck

Rosedale Center
651-330-3064
potluckmn.com

Revolution Hall's half-assed, cashless attempt at delivering a food hall's variety left so much to be desired that when it closed, few tears were shed. Enter chef Justin Sutherland, who took the mess Rosedale Mall made, scaled down the number of options, and served up a reboot better fitting the Twin Cities' dining scene. With a mix of standards like Grand Ole Creamery, Smack Shack, and State Fair faves Nordic Waffles, plus Sutherland's own brainchilds Obachan Chicken & Noodles and Chickpea Hummus Bar, Potluck is proof that local input can make food halls a majestic culinary experience—even inside a mall.



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>> *By Rob Brezsny*

♉ TAURUS (April 20–May 20): I live in Northern California on land that once belonged to the indigenous Coast Miwok people. They were animists who believed that soul and sentience animate all animals and plants as well as rocks, rivers, mountains—everything, really. Their food came from hunting and gathering, and they lived in small bands without centralized political authority. According to one of their creation stories, Coyote and Silver Fox made the world by singing and dancing it into existence. Now I invite you to do what I just illustrated: Find out about and celebrate the history of the people and the place where you live. From an astrological perspective, it's a favorable time to get in touch with roots and foundations.

59 **CANCER** (June 21-July 22): The Italian word *nottaggio* refers to "night roamers," people who wander around after dark. Why do they do that? What do they want to accomplish? Maybe their ramblings have the effect of dissolving stuck thoughts that have been plaguing them. Maybe it's a healing relief to indulge in the luxury of having nowhere in particular to go and nothing in particular to do; to declare their independence from the obsessive drive to get things done. Meandering after sundown may stir up a sense of wild freedom that inspires them to outflank or outgrow their problems. I bring these possibilities to your attention, Cancerian, because the coming days will be an excellent time to try them out.

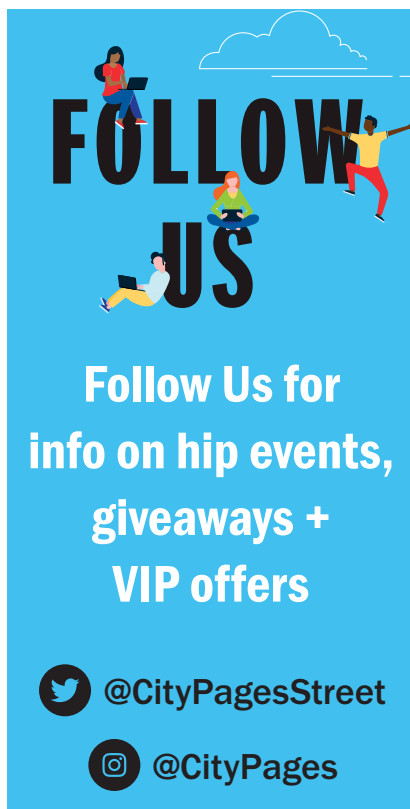
♈ VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22): “Look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else,” wrote playwright Tom Stoppard. That’s ripe advice for you to meditate on during the coming weeks. You’re in a phase of your astrological cycle when every exit can indeed be an entrance somewhere else—but only if you believe in that possibility and are alert for it. So please dissolve your current assumptions about the current chapter of your life story so that you can be fully open to new possibilities that could become available.

P LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): "One must think with the body and the soul or not think at all," wrote Libra author and historian Hannah Arendt. She implied that thinking only with the head may spawn monsters and demons. Mere conceptualization is arid and sterile if not interwoven with the wisdom of the soul and the body's earthy intuitions. Ideas that are untempered by feelings and physical awareness can produce poor maps of reality. In accordance with astrological omens, I ask you to meditate on these empowering suggestions. Make sure that as you seek to understand what's going on, you draw on all your different kinds of intelligence.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Your meditation for the coming weeks comes to you courtesy of author and naturalist Henry David Thoreau. "We can never have enough of nature," he wrote. "We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander." Oh, how I hope you will heed Thoreau's counsel, Sagittarius. You would really benefit from an extended healing session amid natural wonders. Give yourself the deep pleasure of exploring what wilderness means to you.

WAVES **AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20, Feb. 18). Aquarian author Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was a pioneering and prolific African American author and activist who wrote in four different genres and was influential in boosting other Black writers. One of his big breaks as a young man came when he was working as a waiter at a banquet featuring the famous poet Vachel Lindsay. Hughes managed to leave three of his poems on Lindsay's table. The great poet loved them and later lent his clout to boosting Hughes' career. I suspect you might have an opening like that sometime soon, Aquarius—even if it won't be quite as literal and hands-on. Be ready to take advantage. Cultivate every connection that may become available.

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BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY

32 Some artwork
33 “The Wire” drug lord Barksdale
34 Have a meal
35 Abyssinian greeting
39 Jaguar roller
40 Dr. Martens cord
42 “Boys Keep Swinging” singer
43 “Liquid Swords” rapper
45 Talked on and on
46 Drink garnish
49 Priced, as bail
50 Playing for a fool
51 Twitter upload
52 Cartel headquartered in Vienna
53 Steve with the NBA record for the most regular season wins for a rookie coach
54 Church vault
55 “’Tis but a scratch”
56 Stir (up)
57 Signs, as a contract
60 Tasty bread
61 John Lyndon’s post-Sex Pistols band, initially

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I'm a lesbian... but I wanna
have sex with this guy?



Dan Savage

I'm a 20-something more-or-less lesbian. I'm primarily into women, and I'm only interested in relationships with women, but I'm sometimes attracted to men and have enjoyed sex with men in the past. I decided a few years ago not to pursue men and identify as a lesbian. But with a tiny pandemic social bubble and no dating prospects, I find myself very attracted to a male friend/co-worker. He's 30-something, single, straight, and we've hung out a few times since COVID (outside, socially distanced). Neither of us has a management role, we're in different departments, and we rarely interact professionally. Hypothetically, the co-worker part wouldn't be an ethical issue.

I have a feeling he'd be down for a casual pandemic thing, but I have no idea how to broach this. He's respectful and we work for a progressive organization; he's not going to flirt with me. I don't know how to bring up that I sometimes like sleeping with men, and my usual approach to flirting involves a lot of casual physical contact, which isn't possible now. Should I let this go? There's potential for professional issues if feelings get hurt, and celibacy is a responsible pandemic option. But lockdowns and restrictions are going to continue, and we seem well-suited to keep each other company. I'm feeling desperate to touch another person. If it's not a terrible idea, how do I flirt without endangering public health, messing up our friendship, or making work awkward?

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There's no way to ensure a sexual or romantic relationship with a co-worker (or anyone else) won't end badly. But if your relationships and breakups are generally drama-free, and if you've been friends with this guy long enough to know his relationships and breakups have been mostly drama-free, I think you should tell him how you've been feeling. Ask if he's interested in finding a COVID-19 sex buddy, as the Dutch call them, and if he is, tell him you would like to apply.

While most couples meet online these days, COVET, roughly 10 percent of opposite-sex couples still meet through work. And while you're not interested in anything romantic or long-term, couples that meet through work remain the most likely to marry. Which means work relationships

don't always end in tears and/or pink slips and/or lawsuits. (They do sometimes end in divorce.) People who find themselves attracted to co-workers need to be thoughtful about power dynamics, of course, and cognizant of company policies where workplace romance is concerned.

That said, life is short, and this pandemic is going to be long.

The next time you get together for some socially distanced socializing, COVET, tell this guy what you're thinking. If he's progressive, he's no doubt aware that human sexuality is complicated and that while many of us can find a perfect fit among the most commonly understood set of labels, many of us pick a label that doesn't fit perfectly because it comes closest to capturing some combo of our sexual and/or romantic interest and desires. Don't think of this ask—don't think of this disclosure—as walking anything back, COVET, but of expanding and complicating what he already knows about you. You remain homoromantic—you're only interested in other women romantically—are attracted to men and women sexually. In other words, COVET, your heart is lesbian but your pussy is bi.

If he's up for it, swear to each other that you'll handle the inevitable end with grace and compassion. While awkwardness can't be avoided, stupid and unnecessary drama can. And it's my experience that promising to act like grownups ups the chances of everyone acting like grownups. Simply saying, "Well, this might get awkward," or, "This is awkward," if things do get awkward reduces the strength and duration of awkwardness by at least half.

A note to all the guys reading who think COVET's question gives them license to hit on women who identify as lesbians: It doesn't. If there's a lesbian-identified-but-not-averse-to-all-dick dyke in your life and that woman is even remotely interested in fucking you, *she will let you know*. Even if your hunch is correct—even if your dickful thinking is spot-on and that she does wanna fuck you—being disrespectful enough to make the first move instantly disqualifies you.

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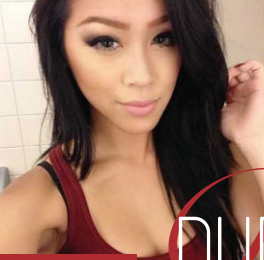
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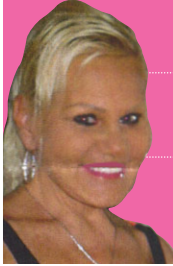
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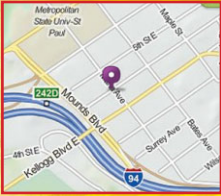
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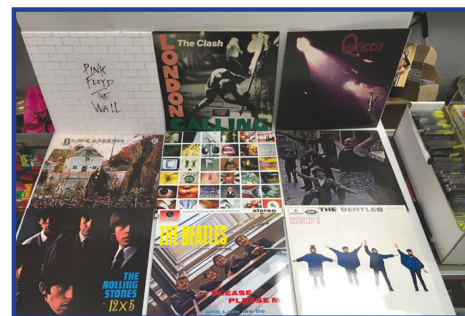
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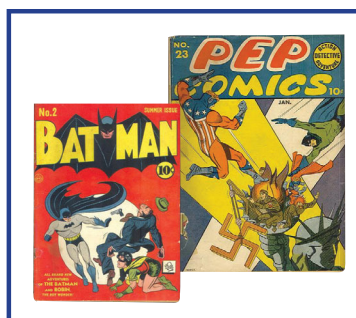
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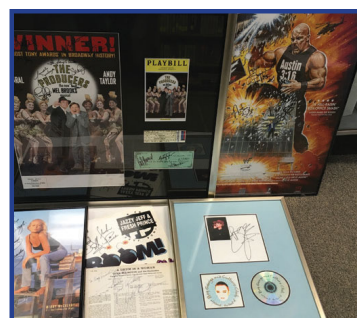
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